My Pokemon Afterlife

By: My Pokemon Afterlife

I died and was reborn in the body of the ten year-old protagonist of the first-gen Kanto region Pokemon game. It's like I got a second life... with Pokemon! I know everything that will happen in this world before they happen. Can I bend the rules? And can I successfully become the Pokemon master?

Status: ongoing

Published: 2021-06-09

Updated: 2024-02-04

Words: 64484

Chapters: 47

Rated: Fiction K+ - Language: English - Genre: Adventure/Humor - Characters: Ash K./Satoshi, Red - Reviews: 160 - Favs: 348 - Follows: 417

Original source: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/13898182/1/My-Pokemon-Afterlife

Exported with the assistance of FicHub.net

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New Game

On my 30th birthday, I died.

It was a heart condition I was born with. I'd been in and out of the children's hospital all my childhood, going through multiple surgeries. Don't feel too sorry for me, though. I lived a lot longer than the doctors initially thought, actually.

I also had a wonderful family. My parents were always supportive of me, and even though I have (sorry, had) this medical condition, they taught me to keep my chin up and have respect for myself and for others. I had a younger sister too, three years my junior.

Three months before I died, when I collapsed from the first of the heart failures that would eventually lead to my death, it was my sister that gave me the old Gameboy that she and I played with in our childhood. To keep me entertained in the hospital, she said. Thanks, sis.

Thus I spent the last weeks of my life playing Pokemon, first-gen Kanto region games, and the FireRed remake. I was never a fan of the following generations, even Gold and Silver.

Then, my heart gave out on my thirtieth birthday. I felt my consciousness falling slowly but deeply into the darkness that would transition me to whatever afterlife that awaited me.

In the darkness I waited for some time, I think, because when you're a bodiless soul, time is a bit different. I awaited heaven (I hoped!), or hell (I don't feel like I deserved this), or something… but nothing happened for a while.

Then eventually, I heard a male voice.

"Hello, there!"

General Kenobi? Just kidding.

But it was a male voice, a middle-aged man's voice I had never heard before. It was gentle, a sincere greeting. Was this… Jesus? God? Oh, thank God!

Then he said, "Welcome to the world of Pokemon!"

Hmm. Odd. I'm pretty sure God just said 'Welcome to the world of Pokemon!'

I tried to speak but of course, I had no body, no vocal cords to use.

God went on: "My name is OAK. People call me the Pokemon Professor."

Then it hit me.

OH MY GOD. WHAT THE F-

And even as this thought was going through my head, he asked: "Are you a boy or a girl?"

I instinctively thought "a boy," as I was in my past life, and he moved onto "What is your name?"

And before I could think of anything else, he said "So your name is Ash!"

He didn't wait much before moving on to "this is my grandson" blah blah blah.

I think this is when I passed out, as best a bodiless soul reborn into a video game afterlife could pass out.

Mom

"Wake up, son," my mom said, gently tapping me on the shoulder. "Time to get up!"

So I hadn't died after all. It was just a weird dream because I was playing Pokemon too much in the hospital bed.

"Oh thank god, mom," I said, turning towards her, rubbing my eyes. "I had the weirdest drea- AH WHO ARE YOU?" I sat up, shouting.

A lady I'd never seen in my life was smiling at me with confusion. "Your mom, silly!"

But she wasn't. And my voice… my voice! Why was it so high-pitched?

"Ah, ah," I tested my voice. A boy's voice. A ten year boy's voice.

OH MY GOD. I'm still dreaming. No, this is not a dream.

I touched my face. A small face, with a smooth baby skin. And my hair was not as thick and bushy as I knew it to be. I looked down at my arms and legs. A boy's body. Oh no.. this couldn't be real, could it? But the evidence was all there. I was somehow put in the body of a small boy.

I looked around the room. My bed was in the corner, and in the middle of the room there was an old TV with a SNES attached to it. A staircase at the far corner of the room was leading downstairs. I looked behind me to see an old desktop (90's style), and a pot of palm-looking plant in the opposite corner.

My "mom" looked at me funny while I was inspecting the room, then finally tussled my hair.

"Happy birthday! You're ten now, and you have to get started on your Pokemon journey!"

I've always been an analytical and rational person in my (previous) life, I had time to put my brain to work while my "mom" was preparing breakfast downstairs. For some reason, by some power of God or trick of the devil, my afterlife was in the Pokemon world. Not only that, but I was probably "Ash" or "Red," the main character of the first-gen Kanto region Pokemon world.

I tried the old cliche routine of pinching myself and even slapped myself a few times hard to see if I'd wake up. No dice. I had to come to terms with the fact that this was my life now, no matter how it happened.

I felt the need to use the bathroom, so I went. There was a door leading to one in my room, and it occurred to me that there was no such thing as bathrooms in the original game. So this isn't *just* like the Pokemon game. My consciousness is not just taking a backseat ride through a 2D pixel-art game, but we're living, breathing people, with biological needs to eat and relieve ourselves. Interesting. I wasn't 100% sure how this would play out, but I had no choice but to go with it.

My "mom" must've come up to the room while I was taking a shower, because I found some clothes laid out for me on the bed. It was the outfit which we've all seen Ash Ketchum wear in the Pokemon animation series: jeans, a black t-shirt, a blue vest (water-resistant), and even a pair of green fingerless gloves (I already made up my mind I'm not wearing these).

I went downstairs to find a wonderful breakfast of pancakes, eggs, and sausages laid out for me on the dining table. At first I was skeptical of what they would taste like, given that this was supposed to be a video game world (or some sort of hell), but they were actually really tasty. My new mom was a great cook. And I teared up a bit, remembering my old mom, my real mom, from my previous life. My previous family.

"Are you alright, dear? Is something the matter?" my Pokemon world mom asked with genuine, loving concern, and this warmed my heart.

Suddenly I felt something weird in my head. I definitely had

memories of my previous life, before I died, but my memories of that childhood were mixed with the memories of me, as Red. It must've been triggered when I was having a conversation with my Pokemon world mom, because all of a sudden I felt genuine love for this person, as if I had known her my entire life.

"I'm alright, mom," I said, smiling. "This is some good food. Thank you."

She smiled and poured me a glass of orange juice. We enjoyed the breakfast in silent happiness. Then, I suddenly had a thought.

"Mom, do I HAVE to go on my Pokemon journey? Can't I just stay here with you? What if I don't want to be a Pokemon trainer?"

Mom looked a bit surprised.

"Well, I mean you don't HAVE to, dear," she said. "But are you sure? You've been talking about this for months, about how you're excited to finally leave Pallet Town and explore the world? Catch and train Pokemon?"

She was right. I mean, I guess I had the option of staying here, but if there is some higher power had placed me in this Pokemon World, and Pokemon were REAL, why the heck would I NOT go on a Pokemon journey?

I had to proceed. If this world wanted me to be the main character, then I had to play the game. Literally.

"Alright, I just had some last thoughts, that's all. Now I think it's time for me to go, mom," I said, getting up from the breakfast table.

She gave me a smile.

"This is your birthday present, son! A brand new backpack!"

She handed me the backpack, already packed for the journey. It was actually really sturdy and nice. She opened the compartments and showed me all the things inside. There were considerably more than what you'd find in the first Pokemon game, since I had to actually live and survive by myself out there in the world. There was

much more practical stuff like clothing, food, etc. It was a relief. I can't believe that in the original show, everyone was just okay with the fact that a mom kicked her ten year-old son out into the world without any adult supervision. Weird.

She also gave me a wallet. It was a velcro wallet with bright yellow neon lining, fit for a ten year-old. It had a "P" on it that I assume stood for Pokemon. It was a glorious thing. And more glorious were bills of Pokedollars inside.

"It's 50,000 Pokedollars," she said. "If you need more, you know what to do."

"Uh, sorry mom. Remind me what to do again?"

She laughed and explained how I could call her and she can transfer more money, and this could be done at any Pokemon Center. Right.

With all this done, and lots of hugs and kisses from my mom (which was nice), I headed out the door, and into Pallet Town.

Pallet Town

In the house, I wasn't really sure what Pallet Town would look like, whether it'd have the game layout of just four buildings for a "town," or whether it'd be more like from the animation series, with a rich layout of an actual rustic town. I'm glad it was the latter.

I'm sure it isn't like any other town that I would know, since this world isn't the one from my previous life. The economics and interactions of townships would behave completely different, especially with the existence of Pokemon…

Oh my god! Pokemon! Suddenly I became very excited. This world had POKEMON! I could catch, train, and interact with REAL Pokemon! Oh god, what would they look like? My heart started to beat more quickly. I started to look around in excitement, but I couldn't see any other residential houses.

It didn't take long before I realized what I needed to do. I needed to head North, towards Route 1, upon entering which Professor Oak was supposed to stop me, take me back to his lab, and give me… my very own… STARTER POKEMON!

Now I was giddy with excitement. I looked back at my house, and saw mom still standing there, waving at me and smiling.

"Hey, mom! Which way's North?" I shouted.

She pointed to the direction directly opposite of where the front door was facing. Ah, of course. Directly towards the back of the house. How could I not have guessed.

And that means… ah, there it was. To the right of my house, across the street, was another just like mine, but noticeably better. Richer. Gary's house.

I smiled at the predictability of this world. The big pieces were definitely based off of the game that I knew and loved.

I waved at my mom and started to walk on the road, towards Route 1 and saw, maybe a few hundred yards down the dirt road, the entrance to a more bushy and forest-y area. That must be it!

I was already thinking about what my starter Pokemon should be when a thought occurred and stopped me dead in my tracks.

What version am I in?

I realized that this was of tremendous importance. Depending on the version of the original Kanto region Pokemon game, I could have the choice between the three starter Pokemon or I could… get… a Pikachu?

THAT'S SO LAME!

I mean, no offense to Pikachu-lovers and Pikachu itself (herself?), and even I myself liked the friendship between Ash and Pikachu from the animation series, but… as a starter Pokemon? That's definitely not bound to be my first choice of Pokemon!

I didn't know what to do, but I've always been the kind of person to assess the situation before making any decisions. I did a 180 and started walking South.

Here's why:

Normally, in the games, Professor Oak wouldn't be in the lab at this point, and you'd have to try to walk out of Pallet Town to the North when he'd interrupt you and bring you to his lab. In his lab, then, he'd give you the first pick of three starter Pokemon (Bulbasaur, Squirtle, or Charmander). Or, if this weird afterlife was the Yellow version after all (urgh), he'd give you a Pikachu. I wasn't going to let things go this way if I could help it.

I walked for about five minutes and I could already see, to the left ahead of me, a big, industrial-looking building. It had to be Professor Oak's lab. I didn't see anyone on the road or outside of the building. Just to be safe, I went around the back of the building (no windows there), and snuck up to the East side, where I could easily peek in the windows. It was easy to be stealthy in the body of a small ten

year-old boy.

There were a few younger men and women in lab coats (Professor Oak's aides, of course), walking about near the only entrance to the lab. They were using the computer, occasionally referring to paper publications. And, to the back of the lab, no professor, as was expected, but … aha! There he is! Gary, my supposed rival, the super-arrogant, self-absorbed fool that creepily followed you (but also somehow always ahead of you) throughout the whole journey. He had the whole spikey/bushy hair and everything! Good, he hasn't noticed me sneaking around.

It was important to note that he was there, but more importantly, between him and the window I was peeking in through there were three Pokeballs, laid in a row on a lab table like merchandise displayed in an Apple Store. So it wasn't Yellow version, after all, thank god! It was the original first-gen Kanto game that topped the must-have toy lists of the late 90's - early 2000's era. I remembered, literally a lifetime ago, the playground debates of whether Red version or the Blue version was better (nobody had Green in my neighborhood), and the crazy times battling one another using connection cords, etc. Ah good times…

I caught myself smiling at the three Pokeballs, forgetting for a minute that I had actually died and this was a weird afterlife. I could actually TOUCH them. Professor Oak would ask me to choose one. I wondered what Bulbasaur, Squirtle, and Charmander would look like.. In real life! I even remembered a conversation I had with a friend in the past life, saying how awesome it would be if you could start the game with all three starters… Wait. WAIT.

WAITTTTTT WHATTTTTTT

Why don't I do just that? It's not like the Pokeballs are under lock and key, hidden away in a safe, or stored on the PC like they are in this world. They're just out there, RIGHT THERE on the lab table. And I didn't know where Oak was at this moment, but I hadn't seen him nearby (trust me, I was looking out for him), and assumed he must be near Route 1, waiting for me or Gary. And if Oak wasn't here, well then, who was to stop me from taking the Pokeballs?

Oh, this was too good. Too, too good.

At first, being born again into this ten year-old boy's body was weird and scary. It's only been a few hours, and I missed my REAL family, my family from my previous life. I wanted to hug my parents and my sister one more time. I also wanted to say proper goodbyes to my friends, have one final pint of beer with them. And when the memories of THIS body started mixing with my real memories, it was weird, like waking up from a very lucid dream.

But when I thought about what being in this body in this world meant, the more excited I got. First of all, as far as I could tell, I had a healthy body. When I was ten in my previous life, I was going in for regular check-ups at the children's hospital to make sure my heart was doing okay. It was stressful for my entire family, and it was scary!

Now, I'm not only healthy, but also free! Free to roam in this world. It didn't have a regular school for kids, or any other institutions that I needed to go to. As far as I could tell, my only obligation was to catch and train Pokemon!

And if it wasn't already really awesome that I was in this Pokemon world, I was apparently the protagonist of the original game! Things would supposedly work around my actions, and Gary just standing there waiting for his grandpa, Professor Oak, instead of taking the sweet starter Pokemon for himself was good enough for me. I had to act before he started to garner interest in them.

ANDDDDDD

If it wasn't already super effing awesome that I was the PROTAGONIST in this POKEMON world, I was also still ME, the me from my previous life, armed with the intellect and experience of a 30 year-old man, who, despite having a genetic heart condition that cut his life short, had otherwise lived a normal life. I went through school, university, and even had a job. I had knowledge of a whole other world that transcended this one. After all, it was people from this other world that created this one.

This made me very excited, dissipating any anxiety I had about

being in this body and in this world.

I was going to become a freaking Pokemon master.

Starter Pokemon

When I played the original Red and Blue versions, I played to complete the story, not to complete the Pokedex. Like most people, I played through to catch the Legendary birds, defeat the Elite Four, Gary, catch Mewtwo, defeat Elite Four and Gary again, and then moved on to other games. I might have battled a friend or two, but that's about it.

My favorite part of the game, therefore, was not catching every single Pokemon out there, but grinding levels up on the rare, strong Pokemon, then obliterating NPC's in battle with one-hit knockouts due to the stats difference. I felt like a god.

I figured, if I'm going to achieve this, in this real, physical world, then I was going to have to get a leg up, a head start. I was going to use my fourth-wall knowledge to gain every advantage. And the first goal was to get all three starters.

I wasn't about to run into Oak, only to have him offer me just ONE Pokemon, then have Gary pick the EXACT COUNTER to my pick, like a douche (this was actually my chosen nickname for Gary when I played the games. "Douche." Haha, don't judge me).

Even if I straight up asked Oak to give me all three, I was sure he would say that I was being greedy, or that Gary also needed one, blah blah blah, and therefore just reject me. But if I were to STEAL them, and pass it off as a mistake of a 10 year old child? What are they gonna do?

Call Officer Jenny?

So here's the situation: there were three of Professor Oak's aides in the front of the lab building. They seemed to be quite busy with their work, and their line of sight to the lab table with the Pokeballs seemed to be obstructed by the bookcases, so as long as I kept to the blindspots, they couldn't see me take anything.

The problem was Gary. He was too close to the lab table, and he

would definitely see me take the Pokeballs. If only there was a way to distract him somehow. Jeez, he wasn't even pacing the room! I have to admit, he was damn patient for a ten year-old. That cocky son of a… WAIT. Cocky! He was the cockiest, most arrogant character in the entire game! Even after you beat him in every battle in the game, he's still cocky, never coming to terms that the main character could beat him, could be better than him… Aha! I had an idea.

I walked around to the front of the lab, and pushed open the door as naturally as I could. One of the Professor's aides looked up at me from his computer screen, but only for a second, and then went back to his work. Similar reactions from the other two aides. I smiled when they looked at me, but didn't say anything. I acted like I belonged there, walking to the back of the lab, where Gary and the Pokeballs were.

And there he was! Gary, up close, looked less like the "cool" kid that was designed to be the protagonist's rival in the game. He just seemed like a kid to me. But then again, so was I. Especially in Gary's eyes, I was the uncool kid, the kid that would never measure up to him.

And as if to confirm this:

"Yo! Gramps isn't here!" Gary said, in the utterly condescending tone only he could muster.

I turned on my act. I gotta play the naive and inferior ten year-old he expects me to be. I didn't tell you I took Drama for four years in high school in my previous life, did I?

"Oh no, I- I see," I stuttered on purpose. "That's too bad." I put on my most helpless face.

Gary took the bait.

"What's the matter? Already afraid I'm going to get all the gym badges before you? Wait, do you even know what Pokemon Gyms are? HAHAHA!"

Perfect. Time to reel him in.

"We- well, I was going to go off on my Pokemon journey, but when I got near the North edge of Town, I was attacked by a monster! It looked like a rat, but it was much bigger and had really big, sharp teeth. I think it was one of those Poke-the-mons?"

Gary bursted out laughing, mockingly. Perfect.

"Poke-the-mons? POKE-THE-MONS? Hahaha, you idiot! It's Pokemons! And the one you saw is called a Rattata!"

I put on my best "wow-very-impressive" face.

"Wow, Gary, you know so much!"

I was afraid he might call me out on overacting, but he didn't.

"OF COURSE I do, I know everything there is to know about Pokemon! Definitely more than you!"

Oh, only if you knew.

"Oh, I, yes, of course," I acted flustered. "Anyways, I didn't know what to do, so I ran back here, looking for Professor Oak. But I see he isn't here. Oh jeez, I guess we BOTH have to wait for him here, since WE can't do anything about that big Rattatata, or whatever you said it was. WE are SO HELPLESS."

There. I threw my dice. I didn't know how Gary would react to this.

"What did you just say?" Gary shouted in anger. "What do you mean, 'WE'? Don't think for a second that I'm anything like you, you loser. I was born to be a winner, to be a Pokemon master! Just because you can't catch a Rattata, doesn't mean that I can't either."

Almost there.

"You- You mean you know how to catch the Rattatimatata?"

Just a little more...

"IT'S CALLED A RATTATA, YOU FOOL," he was livid. "And OF COURSE I know how to catch a stupid little Rattata, you just goad it a bit and throw a Pokeball, it's easy!"

Time to bring it home. This time, I slightly dropped the shy tone and enunciated each word with emphasis.

"I. Bet. You. Can't. Catch. The. Rattatata."

This threw him over his arrogant edge.

Not knowing what I had planned to do once he left, he gave me an angry shove, and stormed out of the lab (undoubtedly to go catch the imaginary Rattata), all the while muttering angry claims of superiority at me.

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is how you manipulate a ten year-old. Wow, that sounds wrong, but you know what I mean.

There was no time to waste.

I glanced into the front part of the lab, and after confirming no one was watching, I grabbed the Pokeballs off the lab table. Their metal surface was cool and smooth to the touch. No alarm went off, and though tempted, I didn't take the risk of inspecting them in awe. I shoved them deep inside my backpack and as casually as I could, walked out of the lab.

It was time to begin my Pokemon journey.

Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Charmander

There was only one thing that concerned me about taking all three starters: would they obey me?

I knew that they belonged to Professor Oak from his "Pokemon trainer days," but the starter Pokemon were all supposed to be level 5, which I expected to also represent their youth. That means they haven't spent a lot of time with the Prof to grow an unyielding sense of loyalty, right? Would they all accept me for their Pokemon trainer?

I wanted and needed to find out, but I also wasn't about to run into a wild Pokemon encounter before I found out.

It was therefore not straight towards Route 1 I headed, but to a secluded open area with a few trees, just East of the Route 1 entrance, on the North edge of Pallet Town. Here, I could assess the situation without fearing being seen from the main road. With great anxiety but also excitement, I took out the three Pokeballs and held them in my open palms.

They had shrunk down to the small size, just like in the animated series. This detail of Pokeball technology was never discussed in any depth in the original game, but it appears that whatever Pokegod that created this world allowed some things to slip over, just like this wider expanse of Pallet Town, compared to the games.

I grabbed one of the small Pokeballs between my thumb and index finger. It was about the size of the average chicken egg, but spherical. I held it up in one open palm and the weight felt nice. I knew what to do. I pressed the button in the middle, where the red and white metal met. The ball expanded into the size of a baseball.

"Here goes," I said, and threw the ball in the ground about four feet from me.

With that signature "pop" sound, a bright light came zapping out of the Pokeball and began "phasing into shape" (this is the best I could describe it) in front of me. And as this was being done, not unlike

how Captain America's shield comes returning to his hand after he throws it fighting the baddies in the MCU movies, the Pokeball returned to the hand with which I threw it.

When I looked back to where I had thrown the Pokeball, the now fully phased-in Bulbasaur looked up at me with gentle curiosity. I stared at it, frozen in place with awe. It wasn't cute like you would think the cartoony Bulbasaur to be; it had reptilian skin and bulgy eyes with a red tint, and the BULB, my goodness! It was really a bulb, like that of a giant plant, somehow biologically attached to the back of this little beast. And yet, it was… cute! It looked into my eyes, part in caution, part in curiosity, waiting to see what I would do.

I slowly took a knee to come closer to eye-level with the little beast. It followed my eyes down, but didn't flinch or grow nervous. That was a good sign.

"Hi, Bulbasaur," I said with the softest, non-threatening voice. It wasn't hard to do in a ten year-old's body.

"I'm… Ash," I said. "Is it okay if we become friends?" I held out my hand, How to Train Your Dragon style.

I'll be honest… I half expected him to say "Bulba, Bulbasaur!" but he just let out a small purring sound, like a cat. He took a shy first step, then after smelling my hand, came even closer. I gently pet him on the head, and he closed his eyes in pleasure. And let me tell you, it was the coolest thing I've experienced, previous life included.

Then I became curious.

"Hey Bulbasaur, do you understand what I'm saying?" I asked, standing up.

He looked up at me, and rubbed his face against my leg. I guess that's a… maybe?

"Can you go over there?" I pointed at a spot about 10 yards away.

He looked up at me and tilted his head, and I was about to repeat myself when he ran towards where I pointed, stopped, then turned

around to face me. He waited for more instructions. I was awe-struck.

"That's so awesome," I muttered under my breath.

But I didn't let myself pause for too long.

"Bulbasaur, come here, please," I waved him over and had him sit by my feet.

I reached for the other two Pokeballs, turned them "on," so to speak, then threw both out at the same time, some distance in front of me.

As the two Pokeballs snapped back in my hands at a satisfying velocity (imagine catching a really fast baseball throw in your hands, minus the pain), I saw Squirtle and Charmander phase into reality.

They both looked around and saw each other, and then seemed to inspect their surroundings, but then quickly looked at me with the same curiosity and caution as Bulbasaur.

"Hi Squirtle, hi Charmander," I said. "I'm Ash, and this is Bulbasaur. Is it okay if we all become friends?"

Squirtle was the first to come. He took two steps forward and then jumped into my arms, giving me a hug like a toddler. He actually was like a big blue turtle, but his skin was not slimy or wet. Difficult to explain, and you'll have to forgive me for my shortcomings in the Pokemon physiology. I'm not a zoologist. Or… Pokemonologist.

Charmander, on the other hand, did take a few steps forward, but stopped right in front of me, looking up into my eyes. He opened and closed his mouth a few times, exposing his small but sharp teeth, and I guessed it was some sort of a communicative behaviour, like telling me he didn't completely trust me. But then I saw him visibly relax his body and blink his eyes a few times, slowly. As if to tell me "Alright, I'll give you a chance."

So, yeah. That's how I ended up with all three starter Pokemon. Yes, I can confirm that they do not say their names. I'm guessing that was something that the producers of the game and the anime put in to make Pokemon more likeable to children. It would be

creepy, if you think about it, if these creatures could utter clear syllables like people.

They did, however, seem to understand me fine. I think they interpreted what I was saying more through my tone and body language, at least. I guess it was not much unlike learning how to "hear" a new language when a person moves to another country to live there. You usually learn how to understand what people are saying, even when you don't know exactly what is being said.

Despite clear differences to what they were in the games or the anime, Pokemon turned out to be very intelligent animals. Then I remembered Meowth from Team Rocket and wondered if he was here… hmm… But that's for another time.

I explained to the trio that we were going on a journey, and it would be fun! I also told them that there might be times when they'd have to fight and protect themselves. I'm hoping that they got the gist of what I was trying to say 'cause they seemed to be listening.

I also practiced some movements together, but more on that later.

After a while, I put them back into their Pokeballs (you press the button and then you point the stream of laser-looking white light thingy at the corresponding Pokemon). I shrunk the Pokeballs and put them in my jacket pocket, zipping it shut.

They were my most precious balls. Wait. That came out wrong. You know what I mean.

Having made friends with all three starter Pokemon the best I could, I now felt confident enough to really begin my journey.

It was time for Route 1 to Viridian City.

The coast was clear when I got to the entrance of Route 1, leading out of Pallet Town. There was a signpost that stated: "Route 1: to Viridian City." I briefly reflected on the bias of naming the path as "Route 1." And it wasn't even fully paved! Wasn't even all dirt roads, even! It looked like a dirt road that's been long neglected and had allowed the forest to slowly creep in. Some parts of it were thick with

trees and tall shrubbery I couldn't pass through, and some parts were tall grass. Did people even pass by here? Jeez.

There was no one in sight, and so I started heading into Route 1. It wasn't long before I heard someone calling after me.

"Wait!" It was Professor Oak. "It's too dangerous to go!"

Where the heck did he come from? I swear he wasn't behind me a second ago.

I was thinking about letting him know I had Pokemon protection with me, when I noticed Gary running up behind him.

Hmm… this didn't happen in the game.

It was then I heard a loud, aggressive squeaking noise behind me, and I turned around to see the biggest rat I'd ever seen in my entire life.

And it was running straight at me.

Route 1 (Part 1)

I would be lying if I said I didn't want to unleash hell upon the rabid-looking Rattata that was charging me. My hands reached for all three of my Pokeballs. Then I remembered that Prof. Oak and Gary were right behind me, so a wiser idea prevailed.

"Ahh!" in a feigned and exaggerated panic, I ran towards Prof. Oak and Gary. "HELP ME!"

I saw Prof. Oak with a Pokeball in hand, about to throw it at the Rattata, but Gary stepped in front of him first.

"I got this, gramps!" he said, throwing the Pokeball at the Rattata.

The Pokeball made contact, and then opened up with a familiar "pop" sound. Rays of bright white light came out of the Pokeball, and appeared to engulf the Rattata. It "swallowed" the creature whole, so to speak, and then closed up and fell to the ground. It did the whole bleeping and twitching thing on the ground, then settled with a satisfying "bleep."

"HA!" I caught it!" Gary declared triumphantly, running to claim his Pokemon. "My first Pokemon! Did you see that, Ash?"

I put on my best "very impressive, Gary" face. I had to try very, very hard not to laugh.

"It seems Gary can take care of himself," Professor Oak reached me. He looked at me with kind concern. "But are you alright, Ash?"

"Yes, I'm okay, Professor, thanks for asking."

"That's a relief. But what were you thinking, going into the wild on your own like that?" Oak asked.

"Well, I came looking for you at the lab earlier, but didn't see you there."

"Yeah, we were waiting for you, gramps, but then Ash told me about this Rattata, so I went home to grab my bags and my Pokeballs and had to save him! IN YOUR FACE, ASH! I CAUGHT IT!"

"Yeah, you sure did, Gary," I said. I guess I have to be glad that a wild Rattata was actually here. This lucky coincidence added validity to my story.

Gary smirked condescendingly at me. Then turned to his grandpa for a second and asked "Why'd you call me over anyways?"

"Well, I had a few Pokemon in my lab and wanted to give one to each departing trainer."

Oh shoot. He mentioned the starters. He would eventually figure out that I took them, and then maybe he would ask for them back. What about Gary? If he found out that he was actually supposed to take one of them too, he might take one off of me. I had to think quickly.

"Professor, you mean you were going to give me my very first Pokemon?" I asked.

"Yes," Oak replied. "It would be dangerous to go into the wild without a Pokemon to defend yourself with."

Gary looked at Oak.

"Is that why you called me over, gramps? Go give me a Pokemon?"

"Yes, Gary, and now that we're all here, we can walk back to the lab together."

Uh-oh. We couldn't walk back together. I had to think quick.

"WAIT," I said. Then an idea. "I mean YES OF COURSE, Professor Oak. It would definitely be unreasonable for a ten year-old kid like me and Gary to not receive any help from you. Let's go, Gary, let's get a Pokemon from Professor Oak because we'd be helpless without his Pokemon." I turned to walk towards the lab, and Oak started after me.

For a second Gary said nothing, and I was afraid my bluff was

called.

Then he shouted, "No, way!I'm not going."

YESSSSSSSSS GO AWAYYYYYY

Prof. Oak and I turned towards him.

"What do you mean, Gary?" Oak asked.

"I don't need to come with you to the lab, gramps, because I already caught my first Pokemon! I don't need you to help me, like I'm some sort of a LOSER."

Gary went off on a short rant about how he was the best and was going to be the Pokemon master, and he didn't need a Pokemon from his grandpa. Blah blah blah.

"But Gary, I think you'd really like one of the Pokemon I was going to give you," Professor Oak said.

OMG STFU OAK

I needed Oak to let Gary go.

"Oh, on second thought, Professor," I said. "Gary DID catch that SCARY Rattatata all by himself, showing that he can take care of himself. I had NO IDEA what to do, but Gary even knew how to catch it!"

"That's right, gramps!"

Oak seemed to consider this, and then relented.

"Well, I guess you're right, boys," he said. "Alright Gary, why don't you go on your journey now, seeing as how you have all your stuff on you. Don't forget to check in with me, okay?"

"Fine, gramps, fine," Gary said. He then turned to me, triumphantly. "Ha! It's the first day, and I'm already ahead of you, Ash! Smell ya later!"

He practically sprinted away from us, towards Viridian city. What a relief.

"Come on Ash, come to the lab with me."

We walked back into the Pallet Town threshold, and I walked with him a few dozen yards. Then, confident that no one (especially Gary) was within earshot, I stopped walking.

"Professor Oak," I called.

"What's the matter, Ash?"

"I have something to confess," I said. He waited for me to continue.

I had to play this differently than I did with Gary. Let's think. Professor Oak. How can I get away with this? What pushed his buttons? What's his nature? A Pokemon "expert" whose Pokedex data is blank… But nevertheless a paternal figure. I gotta continue playing the helpless card.

"Earlier when I went to the lab looking for you, I didn't find you there, and when Gary rushed out to deal with the Rattata, I thought it would help, so I actually took the Pokemon from the lab."

"Oh?" He didn't seem too upset, but the jury was still out.

"You see, I was afraid, and so I thought having a Pokemon would be helpful. Then I saw the Pokeballs just sitting there, and I knew that they were meant for us."

"But you said you took all three?"

I saw this question coming.

I took the three Pokeballs out, and held it out for him. I tried to make my voice like I was on the verge of tears.

"I'm so sorry, Professor," I said. "At first I took just one, but then I realized that if I didn't take the others, they would just sit there, on your lab table, for a very long time."

"That's not... true" he replied. He didn't sound sure.

"Really? You're telling me that if I took one, and Gary took another, the third one wouldn't just sit there? Like… forever?"

The Professor was surprised by my remark. The notion probably never occurred to him before. He thought about it, opened his mouth, as if to say something, then closed it again.

"I'm sorry I took them," I lied. "But I knew that Gary was good enough to catch a Pokemon all on his own, and I didn't want to take one Pokemon and leave others behind, neglected. I DON'T EVEN HAVE A DAD."

I just added that last part for fun.

He seemed to consider this a bit.

"I promise I'll take really good care of them," I said, using my ten year-old innocence to my advantage.

"Gee, I…"

"I will travel across the land, Professor," I started, trying my best to speak, not sing. "Searching far and wide… Each Pokemon, to understand, the power that's inside…!"

He thought about it for another few seconds, then relented.

"Okay, Ash. I guess that's fine. Just take good care of them like you promised, and check in with me from time to time, okay?"

"Of course, Professor! Thank you!"

He wished me well on my journey and walked back to the lab alone.

In the end, what could he do? Gary and I were the only two trainers leaving Pallet Town, and no one else needed the starter Pokemons. And I must've appealed to the Professor Oak NPC's underlining programming in a way that allowed me to get away with it.

I walked back into Route 1 and started walking North. I was thrilled I

got away with taking all three starters! Now nothing was stopping me from getting to Viridian City.

Well...except that group of half dozen angry-looking Rattata there. They were running right at me.

Damn it.

Route 1 (Part 2)

A/N: A bit short of an episode to finish off the Route 1 stuff. Viridian stuff coming soon! Cheers.

Episode 6: Route 1 (Part 2)

You know how in the Pokemon games, when you walk in the tall grass areas, one wild Pokemon would attack you? And you take turns making moves until you capture it or defeat it or run away or whatever?

That's all BS.

They attack you however they want to, in whatever number they can muster. Also, they don't wait for you to make moves "in turns." This is not one of those Russian competitions where contestants take turns slapping each other until one of them faints or gives up (this is a real thing). It's more like the UFC, man.

And these Rattatas were fierce. They might have been related to the one Gary caught (no sign of him, by the way), or maybe witnessed that encounter and decided to attack any humans they came across, but these guys were out for blood. I'm not sure if they could've actually done any fatal damage to me, being really small, but I wasn't going to find out. And if they were going to attack in a group like this (I counted eight, but they were really fast so there could have been more), I wasn't going to play by the rules either.

I ran to create a bit of distance between me and the pack, turned around abruptly to stand my ground. I still saw them running at me, ready to do some damage. I grabbed all three Pokeballs and threw them out in front of me.

"Tackle!" I shouted, as the blinding lights appeared from the Pokeball.

Bulbasaur, Squirtle, and Charmander popped out of their digital resting places just in time to intercept three of the Rattatas running

ahead of the group. I'm glad my Pokemon were just as quick as the little rats.

Bulbasaur didn't have to "tackle" so much as to stand his ground, and use his butt to smash one of the Rattatas in the teeth. It bounced back a few yards back, visibly hurt. Squirtle turned around, and "launched" himself towards the second Rattata, shell-side first. The shell made contact with this Rattata harder than Bulbasaur's butt. And lastly, Charmander used his left shoulder to tackle the third Rattata. It didn't connect as hard as the other two attacks, but Charmander was already making threatening moves with his flaming tail (which is very cool, by the way, to see in real life), driving back the third Rattata that had already gotten back up.

Remember when I said I had a bit of time with my starter Pokemon back in Pallet Town? I had already figured out what kind of "moves" my Pokemon knew, and what their strengths and weaknesses were.

Bulbasaur had really strong muscles in all four legs, and could tackle the hardest, even though his speed wasn't anything to write home about (yet). He could take physical hits like a beast, though. Tackling and taking tackles from Rattata was not a problem for him.

Squirtle's shell is super tough. I taught him how to tackle shell-first, and it obviously worked out. He was a natural. I even asked Charmander to try scratching the shell, and it didn't even leave a mark. I have to teach Squirtle some water moves, though, because he couldn't show me anything in that regard.

Charmander was definitely the quickest of the three, and had the sharpest claws. I tried to teach him to control the flame on his tail, to make it bigger to attack or smaller to dodge water attacks, and saw a little bit of success.

In any case, that half an hour or so I spent before heading to Route 1 was enough to make my Pokemon understand how to fight.

The Rattatas didn't stand a chance. The bravest of the group tried attacking again, but they were already scared. Charmander swiped his tail left and right while advancing, walking backwards. Bulbasaur and Squirtle stood close to him, left and right respectively, effectively

forming a walking phalanx formation (we practiced this too). If any of the Rattatas got close enough to try and flank Charmander, they'd bounce them back with a mean tackle. The Rattatas all ran away, disappearing into the tall grass.

"Good fight guys, good fight," I said. "Come over here. Anyone hurt? No, good. Let's debrief."

"Bulbasaur, do you feel your vines? Oh, they're there, good, you just need some practice controlling them like a whip. Right now, it's too short. Squirtle, you can practice punching and headbutting. We'll find a stream or something later and see if that'll help you learn the water moves. Charmander, go sharpen your claws a little on that big rock over there, and practice swiping and dodging. Here, I'll show you how to shadow-box."

So and so forth.

There was no way to accurately check the "levels" on my Pokemon, or those in the wild. Even later I learned that this isn't actually a thing. Imagine in real life, putting levels on boxers or MMA fighters. It really doesn't work that way, does it? But more on this later.

The rest of Route 1 was uneventful, and I thought perhaps the noise from the battle with the Rattatas spooked other wild Pokemon into hiding. I walked about thirty minutes along the path, until I came out of a clearing and onto a dirt road.

A signpost stated: "Viridian City."

Viridian City Pokemon Center

A/N: Some of you can't read "thirtieth" (30th), and I already said he lived through university and job, etc... smh. Next episode has some fights!

Episode 7: Viridian City Pokemon Center

Allow me to dedicate this entire chapter of my narrative in describing the first Pokemon Center I've ever been in my life. Both in-game and in real (second) life!

Let's get this straight. Pokemon Centers are not like they are in the games. It's not a small building where you're the only one looking to get his Pokemon healed up. They're usually the biggest building in each city, because they provide services to not only Pokemon trainers, but also treats rescued wild Pokemon that were injured, has in-patient Pokemon rooms, basic triage areas for people with Pokemon-inflicted wounds/injuries, etc.

This one in Viridian City is actually four stories tall. It has a cafeteria in the basement (typical), and the treatment center is actually on the second floor, not the first. Have you been to a "Pokemon Center" store in Japan or somewhere else? They usually have Pokemon dolls, toys, etc. Well imagine an entire floor of that on the first floor here. They also do have shops that sell Pokeballs and potions, etc., but just the standard merchandise.

When I walked in the first floor, I was immediately welcomed by receptionists by the entrance. They asked how they could help me and I said I needed my Pokemon to be looked at by a doctor. They sent me to the second floor.

Sorry guys… no nurse Joy. Let's be serious. The notion that all the Nurses Joy were physically identical to each other is just comically ridiculous. It was just a way for the animated series to save time and money on the show. I'm glad it didn't translate to this world.

I took a number and waited for my turn, and a regular Pokemon

nurse took my Pokeballs on a tray and processed the treatment. They were released to me within a matter of minutes on account that they weren't injured at all. Treatment was free!

Afterwards, I decided to explore the other services offered at the Pokemon Center. Item storage and Pokemon storage are totally interesting. I didn't have anything to deposit myself, but I looked over the shoulders of some people using this machine to do so. There's a giant metal box that opens and closes, and I think it somehow "digitizes" physical objects to store and withdraw them. It kinda looks like a bigger version of those personnel screening machines at the airport.

It was a long day, but it was still only my first day in this world. It was going to take some time for me to get used to how things worked here. There were fascinating technology and socio-cultural norms that I needed to become accustomed to.

And suddenly I was tired. And hungry.

Even though mentally I was still me from the previous life, I realized that I was in the body of this ten year-old boy. The physical exertion of the day had taken a toll.

The receptionist told me that in a separate wing of the Pokemon Center, there was a place where Pokemon trainers could rent a small room for a fee. I grabbed some takeout food from the cafeteria downstairs and headed over to the check-in counter.

"Pokerooms," they were called. A staff member asked me how many days I was staying, and I said just one. He also asked me what kind of Pokemon I had with me, and when I asked him why he asked, he said it was because if I had bigger Pokemon (an Onix, for example), I would have to rent a bigger room if I wanted to rest with him. When I asked him why I would take my Pokemon out of the Pokeballs, he looked at me like a monster.

Turns out that hunger and fatigue levels of the Pokemon aren't "frozen" when they go in the Pokeball. Pokeballs are just a convenient way to carry the Pokemon, but you still need to take them out of the Pokeballs and feed them, etc. Have you ever

smelled Pokemon poo? Be glad you never had to.

I got the standard size room for one night, and was panicking when the guy asked me for 2000 Pokedollars. That was a sizeable chunk from what my funds. But then I realized water from the vending machine costed like 200 Pokedollars, and decided… not bad. I was just gonna have to figure out how to make money.

I'm a ten year-old. On a road. Alone. With limited funds. And that was normal.

This was a weird world.

I just wanted to paint a picture of the everyday life of people in this world, since none of this is an element featured in the original games. In future parts of my narrative, I will not dwell on these things, unless I am introducing something new or particularly interesting.

I spent the rest of the evening with all three of my Pokemon, feeding them Pokemon feed (kinda like dog food) that all of them seemed to enjoy. Later I would find that Bulbasaur also enjoys eating plants and flowers, Squirtle fish and plankton, and Charmander small insects and such. Yes, there are regular animals in this world too.

The next morning, I was going to ask for directions to the local Pokemon goods store, when something interesting happened. The staff at the front desk said I had a delivery from someone named Professor Oak from Pallet Town.

I opened a small box and found a small red electronic device about the size of a smartphone.

My very own Pokedex.

Viridian Forest (Part 1)

A/N: If you're enjoying the content, let me know.

Episode 8: Viridian Forest (Part 1)

Two things already happened as a butterfly effect of my actions. First, Gary joined Professor Oak on his way to Route 1 to meet me, and now, he sent the Pokedex by post rather than having to have me visit him in his lab again. This was perfect, because it saved me a trip to the Pokemon mart, and back to Pallet Town (hours off my schedule). After purchasing a dozen Pokeball from the store in the Pokemon Center, I headed North to Viridian Forest.

I tried my best to look for the "alternative route." You know, the one that you can use "cut" to gain access to and from? Route 2? Through the tunnel from Vermilion City? Yeah, I couldn't find it. I did later though, that's for another time.

Instead, the road to Viridian Forest was obvious, as it was the biggest attraction of Viridian City, and the main way to get to Pewter City. There was a gated area with a uniformed staff handing out a pamphlet of the Viridian Forest. It had a general guide of how to get to Pewter City.

Think of Viridian Forest as a National Park, thick with deciduous trees. The thick leaves of the trees and tall grass areas really blot out the sky when you're in the thick of the forest, and color the area in a "viridian" color: dark teal.

Like I said, there is a common path to Pewter City that is not too hard to find, but the forest does have areas that are open for exploration, and can wind around to join the common path. Most of the vast forest is not mapped, and very few trainers travel deep into uncharted territories here.

I walked along the main path for a while, and ran into… nothing. No other people, and no wild Pokemon. Quite eerie, actually. My best guess is that all the wild Pokemon near the main path have been all

caught, so trainers wanting to catch some bug Pokemon had ventured a bit deeper into the forest.

After a while, I decided that it would be boring to get to Pewter City without encountering anything. I needed, after all, to make sure that my Pokemon were battle-hardened and ready for the first gym. So when I saw an opening to the left of the main path, I decided to head that way.

Before long I started to hear a few human voices coming from behind some trees. I decided to sneak up and see what was going on.

In a small clearing, I saw two boys (teenagers, just a few years older than me) standing over a smaller boy (more near my age). At first, I thought the smaller boy had gotten hurt and the other boys were helping him, but it soon became clear that it was a bullying situation.

"Cough it up, loser," one of the bigger boys said, kicking the victim in the leg. Wow, wtf.

"Please, that's all I have, I swear," the smaller boy said. His face was already covered with dirt, tears running down on his cheeks.

It was then I noticed that the smaller boy was clutching an unconscious Pidgey in his arms.

"I get to punch you in the face ten times for every hundred Pokebucks I find in your bag, loser," the bigger boy on the left said. Let's call him Dick 1. There was a Rattata standing next to him.

Dick 2 was already going through the smaller boy's bag. A Weedle was standing next to this guy.

This was obviously so effing messed up. Two teenagers beating the shiz out of a smaller boy, stealing his money and beating not only his Pokemon, but the boy himself. Then I realized…

HOLY SHI- that's actually what happens in the Pokemon game!

Random trainers force you to engage in Pokemon battles you can't run away from, and then if you run out of Pokemon to battle with,

you "faint" and lose money. Whatttttttttt. Why did this never occur to me? Because it was just a GAME.

Why else did you "faint" and end up in the nearest Pokemon Center when you lost a battle? That's because they beat you up silly and somehow you made it back into the Pokemon Center, where the police can keep the law. The police didn't give a damn what happened in between cities.

I assessed the situation. What would I do if I was Dick 1 or Dick 2, trying to beat up a kid to steal his money? I'd use my best Pokemon. A Rattata? A Weedle? How hilarious.

Time for some justice.

Was there a formal or polite way to challenge trainers to a battle? Probably, but I wasn't sure. What I WAS sure about, is that these losers didn't deserve anything of the sort. I was going to give them nothing, but take from them… EVERYTHING.

I circled around so that I could come up from behind them. I then summoned all three of my starters from behind the trees. The Dicks didn't notice.

The best idea was to leave Bulbasaur to deal with Weedle, because he could handle the poisonous stinger if it came to that. Charmander would go and scratch the Rattata to bits. Squirtle… well, keep reading.

"Bulbasaur, tackle Weedle from the side! Charmander, scratch Rattata, watch out for his bites!" I shouted, while holding the bushes aside so the ambush could happen.

"Huh?" Dick 2 cried out.

Without any commands, and caught completely off guard, the tiny Weedle took a full Bulbasaur to its side and went tumbling yards away. As previously instructed, my Bulbasaur didn't wait for further instructions, but kept on charging the insect, tackling him again, and again. No need to wait for the Weedle to get up. Taking turns is a stupid thing.

"Rattata, tackle!" Dick 1 managed to issue this command, but the Rattata was momentarily distracted by the charging Bulbasaur, so it didn't see the Charmander coming. It stood no chance. The scratches went deep, and despite its thick skin (compared to a regular rat, at least), the Rattata started bleeding in some places. I had told Charmander to hold back his attacks against smaller guys, so if he hadn't, I know the cuts would've opened up deeply.

"Are you okay?" I approached the smaller boy, but from a few feet away. I still had to keep my eyes on the Dicks. (Wait, that came out wrong. What, that sounded wrong too. Damn it).

It seemed like he wanted to say something to me, but he was in pain.

"Hey, what's your problem, man?" Dick 1 had the audacity to ask.

"My Weedle! No fair!" Dick 2 matched his buddy.

"Alright," I said. "This is what's going to happen. You're going to take out everything you took from this guy and put them down on the ground here. Then you're going to take out everything YOU have and leave it here too. Then scram!"

"Ha, no way! Caterpie, string-shot on the Bulbasaur!" Dick 1 shouted, as he threw a Pokeball behind me.

"Nidoran, tackle the guy!" Dick 2 shouted, also throwing a Pokeball towards me.

I expected that the Dicks would be carrying more than just one Pokemon. I'm also glad that I expected that the Dicks might order their Pokemon to attack ME, and not just my Pokemon. I wasn't sure if that was an element in this world, but what can I say? I wasn't taking any chances.

Bulbasaur stood still, letting himself get covered with some sticky string. Big deal. Charmander went up to the distracted Caterpie and connected with a scratch-tackle combo. The little big went sprawling on the ground a few feet away, unconscious. Charmander used his flames carefully to free Bulbasaur from the webs.

At the same instant, Nidoran came to tackle me, aiming for my hips, the center of gravity. I'll give it points for that. But I turned my back to face the Nidoran, and guess who was clutching onto my backpack. That's right, Squirtle. He was on my back this entire ambush, waiting as backup. Squirtle's hard shell connected hard with the Nidoran, and at its high speed, it basically knocked itself out.

With even their second Pokemon knocked out, the two teenagers looked flustered and defeated. Even more so when my Pokemon surrounded them from behind.

"Let's try that again," I said. "Leave all your stuff. Now."

They dropped the "loot," let's say, on the ground, and after collecting their Pokemon, ran off into the direction of Viridian City.

"Hey, thanks…" the smaller boy (still older than me) said.

He explained that he was looking for some insect Pokemon deep in the woods, and while he had confidence in his Pidgey to fend Pokemon off, he couldn't handle being teamed up on by those bullies. After the Pokemon battle was over, the bullies had beat him up themselves.

"Is this...usual?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Is it normal for Pokemon trainers to force others to battle, then beat up the loser and take all his money?"

"Uhh… which planet did you come from, man?" he asked.

"I'm… new to this?" I tried.

He explained that usually trainers agreed on the conditions of the battle (i.e. number of Pokemon to use, time, etc.) and wagered an agreed amount of money. Usually these "friendly" battles ended when a trainer submitted, rather than when all the Pokemon fainted, because it's more for practice.

However, deep in the wild where the city police do not patrol, bullies

were out to make MORE money by just simply… well, robbing you. It never got "too serious," the boy explained. They just roughed you up a bit, and took money. No one ever leaves another person for DEAD. That's still so wrong...

He absolutely refused to take all the money. He took a bit of money that he claimed was originally his, and left the rest to me. The bullies had left, however, some potion sprays, and he asked me if he could use one for his Pidgey. I said of course.

Release the safety pin, which "opens" the spray, then use the button to release a misty dose of nanobots that … just kidding. I don't actually know how it works, but the Pidgey started to come around and regained some energy. There was a small cut on his left wing that, after the potion mist had been sprayed on it, seemed to speed up in the healing process. It was like watching Wolverine healing in slow mo. Pretty cool. Maybe there WERE nanobots...

"Say, are you headed to Pewter City?" he asked.

"Yes, but I wanted to catch some bug Pokemon first. And maybe a Pidgey for myself as well." I looked at his Pidgey. It looked up at me with googly eyes. Cute!

"I can't thank you enough for helping me out," he said. "I can at least show you where to find some of the wild Pokemon in the forest. Thanks to the potions, I don't have to go to a Pokemon Center right away."

I agreed right away. I wanted to catch some Pokemon, because I suspected that filling up the Pokedex somewhat would help me in my journey. After all, even though I had a strong THEORETICAL knowledge of Pokemon, the living creatures were entirely new to me in this physical world. Having a friend would help me.

"Say, there wouldn't happen to be Bulbasaurs in the Viridian Forest, would there?" I asked.

"Not on the route between Viridian and Pewter Cities, no. There's supposed to be a family of Bulbasaurs and Ivysaurs led by a really old Venusaur, but their home is deep in the woods, and no one

knows where it is. Lucky you have one already, because it'll be rare to even see one here."

"I see. Then let's start with the bugs," I said.

"My name is Alan by the way," Alan held out a hand. I shook it. "Nice to meet you."

It was good to make a friend in this new world.

Viridian Forest (Part 2)

A/N: All you silent readers suck. Say something or I stop writing.

Episode 9: Viridian Forest (Part 2)

While walking together in search of wild Pokemon, Alan and I had an opportunity to chat, and I naturally learned a bit more about how things worked in this world.

For example, I asked about the Pewter City Gym and learned that you have to defeat gym trainers before you can challenge the leaders for their badges. Even when you become eligible, you have to sign up for a time and date; you can't just walk in and demand a fight. And these gym leader battles only happen once every few days, so it might be a long time before getting a badge.

"So I might not even be able to get a badge for a while even if I'm skilled enough to beat the gym leader? That's kinda lame," I said.

"Well, yes, but that's how the Pokemon League tries to maintain its prestige. But there ARE ways to speed this process, if you're good enough."

What. I need this info. Now.

Alan went on to explain that many Pokemon trainers that are eligible for battling the gym leaders loiter around the gym. When they find someone with an earlier battle date, they fight for their ticker, essentially.

"Wait," I interrupted. "Why would anyone with an earlier time battle someone with a later time? They have nothing to gain?"

"True," Alan admitted. "That's why those with later times often wager larger sums of money for the tickets."

"Hmm, I see."

"Besides," Alan said, "Pokemon trainers are competitive by nature. Many don't back down from a challenge."

"Makes sense."

"Oh, here we are. We have to keep our voice down here."

Alan motioned for me to follow him quietly through some bushes. After a little bit, we came into a thick grove of trees, and a small clearing. There were many Caterpies roaming about, eating leaves, and a whole lot of Metapods on the trees, sleeping and growing.

"Woah…"

It was one thing to be given three Pokemon to you, already captured, and also to have a bunch attack you, but it was quite another to witness a group of a species of Pokemon living peacefully in its natural habitat.

I took Bulbasaur out and walked into the clearing. The Caterpies noticed me and back away, with suspicion. Alan followed behind me.

"Hey you guys," I said, keeping my voice low. "I don't want to hurt any of you, so please don't attack me. Just hear me out."

The Caterpies looked a bit alarmed, but stood still.

"I just want ONE of you, and I promise I'll leave the rest of you guys alone."

The Caterpies made a bunch of… bug noises. They seemed to consider what I said. After a few seconds, the Caterpies made way for a particular Caterpie that was… HUGE. It was almost a full foot taller than any of the others, and had a mean expression on his face. It slowly crawled in front of me, and I was afraid it would attack me, but it stood still.

"He's… so big," Alan said.

I took an empty Pokeball out and threw it the giant Caterpie. Instead of letting it hit itself, Caterpie turned swiftly and batted the Pokeball back at me with its tail. It then puffed its body to make it look bigger.

I suddenly realized what it wanted. "You don't want to go without a fight, do you?"

The Caterpie stood its ground.

"Fine," I said, with a smile on my face. "I respect that."

It wasn't as easy a battle as I thought. The overgrown Caterpie had really hard lips that made my Bulbasaur feel pain. It also could take some tackles like a beast. In the end, though, Bulbasaur was clearly the stronger fighter.

Lying on its side, and panting in exhaustion, the Caterpie finally relented and was captured by a Pokeball.

I took him back out and treated it with a potion that I got off the Dicks earlier, and gave her (turns out) time to say farewell to her friends. One of them really wanted to come with us, so Alan gladly captured that one, too.

"That was something," Alan said while we were walking to a different part of the forest.

"I'm glad it wasn't such an easy fight," I said. "I think Bulbasaur learned something from it."

Again, turns out "levels" and "experience" and "stats" are all in-game stuff that didn't translate over in this world. Nothing appeared quantitatively anywhere, except physical attributes like weight and height that are measured at Pokemon Centers for medical purposes. It would take my own personal skills to be the judge of a Pokemon's fighting fitness and skill.

At a different part of the forest, we had to sneak by a hive of Beedrills. We weren't going to mess with that… there were dozens and dozens of fully grown Beedrills. We snuck past by their main territory until we ran into some harmless Weedles and got one each without much resistance.

We ran into a few nice Pokemon trainers and I agreed on a few battles. I used all three of my starters evenly, working on them evading attacks, mostly. All of them were getting better working with

my commands, but Bulbasaur especially showed great improvement in speed and using his vines.

Oh, just a note on "moves," also a game gimmick. In reality, Pokemon obviously know more than just four moves, and can learn more without forgetting. It's just that some moves become obsolete as they grow and have to fight stronger opponents. Also, they have no limitations on basic moves like tackling and scratching, it's just a matter of stamina. Special attacks, however… we'll talk about it soon.

Another thing that is not part of the game, but is actually common practice in this world: training with just your own Pokemon. You can have them spar each other and you can even practice fighting with them. Obviously during training, you don't aim to hurt each other for real. But imagine training a police dog in real life, and you get a good idea.

Getting closer to the North end of the forest meant that the trees became smaller and sparse. I caught a Pidgey, a Rattata, and both genders of Nidoran here. Then we came to the main dirt road again where we could see other trainers walking towards some buildings ahead in the horizon.

We were finally approaching Pewter City.

Pewter City

Episode 10: Pewter City

Pewter City lies at the Western base of Mt. Moon, which is visible from anywhere within the city. The mountain's massive body casts a massive shadow over the city in the morning, coming up to warm up the air in the early afternoon.

Alan and I went to the Pewter City Pokemon Center together and checked in our Pokemons for healing services.

"What're you going to do now?" Alan asked. "Straight to the gym?"

"Hmm, I don't feel like I'm ready yet," I said honestly. "I think I will spend some time training and exploring the city first."

"Alright," Alan said. "Here, I'll give you my number. I'll prob spend a few days here and then head back home to Cerulean City. My family owns a restaurant there. Look me up when you get there, yeah?"

I added Alan's number into the phone. It was one of those old-school 2G type phones. Apparently this world had amazing Pokemon-related technology, but not so much in the way of human telecommunications. What a weird afterlife.

After I got my Pokemon back, I went to the reception area in the Pokemon Center to gather a bunch of pamphlets with information about local attractions. A lot of it was related to Mt. Moon, of course: "Guided Tour of Mt. Moon," "Moon Stone Mining," and so forth. There was a pamphlet with information of local bed and breakfast places, so I grabbed one of those. And… Oh, that's right! There was the Pewter City Museum of Natural History! I decided to check it out.

On the way to the Museum I saw the Pewter City Gym, of course, on the left. Even from far away I could see a small group of Pokemon trainers standing in a circle, watching two trainers battle it out. It was exciting.

The museum was free to view, so I took my time looking at fossils of ancient Pokemon. There were also sections on natural herbs and minerals with different properties that affected Pokemon, so I took notes on those. For example, a certain species of red berries were too bitter to eat (although not poisonous), but could be crushed up and applied on burns and small cuts. Important things to note, I thought, if I ever find myself in the wild away from spray meds for Pokemon. Those spray things add weight to my backpack, after all, and there was a limit to what I can carry.

Then I remembered… wasn't there an old amber that I can find around here? I walked around the museum until I found the labs that researchers used to preserve and study fossils. I found some people in lab coats in there, and asked about any interesting amber discoveries.

Then these nerds got excited.

They were so happy to see a "young natural history enthusiast" that they blabbed about a section of wooded area near Mt. Moon cave entrance where new ambers were being discovered in dig sites.

"This one here is especially exciting," one of them said, showing me an old amber in a plastic case. "We're hoping that our colleagues in Cinnabar Island can finish their research soon so we can try to extract the DNA from things like this."

"Oh, cool! My Uncle Blaine lives on Cinnabar Island," I lied.

The lab coats all stopped what they were doing, stunned.

"You… you know Blaine? The Cinnabar City Gym leader?" One of them asked.

"Uh huh, he used to come up to Pallet Town all the time and show me his fire Pokemon."

They lost their minds. One of them asked me if I could get him a signature. Another asked if he had seen a Magmar in real life.

I listened and responded to them for a while, then said, "I think Uncle Blaine would be interested in that amber."

And that's how I was given the Old Amber with the DNA of an Aerodactyl inside.

Afterwards I called ahead to a bed and breakfast place in the West part of the city. It was run by an old couple, and had two other trainers staying there. One of them challenged me to a battle.

His Rattata was easily defeated by my Charmander. He was becoming quite a boxer, but instead of blunt fists, it was sharp claws. It was hard to hit him in close quarter battles.

The trainer used his Pidgey next and told him to use gust from the air. It was an attempt to stay away from my Charmander, and it was smart. However, the Pidgey had to get close to a certain degree in order for the gust to do any damage, and in that distance, I told Charmander to make his tail flame as big as he can, and try to get directly below the Pidgey. I actually wanted him to jump to get the flame closer to Pidgey, but he needed to concentrate to make the flame big, and it was already costing him his focus and stamina. The Pidgey tried to get away, but Charmander kept on following him, standing directly under the bird Pokemon with his flame. The heat from the flame and the flying around eventually depleted Pidgey's stamina, bringing him down to the ground. Charmander finished him off with some scratches.

"I have one last Pokemon!" the trainer shouted, bringing out a Geodude. "I caught him from Mt. Moon last week!"

This was great! I got some practice against rock types before going to the Pewter City Gym.

I recalled Charmander and brought out Bulbasaur.

Geodude's two main attacks were throwing small rocks and punching with his big fists. Bulbasaur was able to take both types like a boss (for experimental purposes I told Bulbasaur to buckle down and take the hits, rather than wasting energy to avoid them). One time Geodude came in for a punch and I told Bulbasaur to wrap his vines around him, rather than just whipping him with it. Geodude couldn't move. I told Bulbasaur to start whipping Geodude on the ground left and right, and it was quite funny. The battle was over.

I made enough money to cover the BnB costs and then some.

Tomorrow was going to be another day, and I already had plans.

"Where's the nearest body of water?" I asked the old couple.

It was time to up my water game.

Pewter City Gym (Part 1)

The next morning after breakfast I found a stream in the outskirts of Pewter City. It flowed out from the crevices of Mt. Moon, the old couple explained. The clean and plentiful water source from Mt. Moon was the biggest reason why Viridian Forest grew to be the massive forest that it is today.

This stream was about a yard in width, too small to be called a river, but had a nice steady flow of water. As soon as I brought all my Pokemon out, they started enjoying the natural area.

Rattata and the Nidorans were roaming around, and Pidgey flew around the area looking for worms. Caterpie climbed a tree and started eating the leaves. Bulbasaur and Squirtle both went to soak their feet in water. Charmander too, found a large nearby and started napping on it. He was a lizard, after all. Oh, did I mention you can carry more than six Pokemon? You just can't use more than six in official battles or tournaments. Did you think that the moment you caught a 7th Pokemon, that the Pokeball would magically teleport to a digital box? Get real.

Squirtle was in his element soaking his feet in the stream. Literally. The water seemed to physically energize and empower him.

"Squirtle, do you think you can squirt water on that really hard?" I said, pointing to a tree nearby.

Squirtle puffed up like he was inhaling water, then started releasing a thin stream of water at a very high speed. Basically, imagine a pressure washer. The water made contact with the tree at a speed so high that it started taking off sections of the outer bark of the tree.

"Woah! Nice, Squirtle!"

He went like that for a few seconds, but then stopped and panted. It seemed like there was a limit to his endurance, or a limit to how much water he can spray, or both. He didn't need to drink water to spray it, either. He could soak up the water into his body by making

contact with water (standing on the stream in this case), storing a set amount of it. We spent a good few hours practicing different moves and theories behind how that worked.

I also set up a regimen for the other Pokemon. While I worked one-on-one with Squirtle, I paired up different Pokemon to spar and battle. One of the more special training exercises included trying to dodge and evade all of your sparring partner's attacks, and another was the opposite: letting your sparring partner take free hits on you to increase your endurance and pain tolerance levels.

Charmander was especially important, because his flame was threatening to most of the other Pokemon. I taught them to get used to the heat, to be wary but not afraid of it, and how to deal with it if the flame caught fire on their furs (stop, drop, and roll).

Thus, after a productive morning, I went to the Pokemon Center to heal all my Pokemon to tip-top condition, fed them, and headed to the Pewter City Gym.

There were a few trainers loitering outside, but none of them bothered me as I walked in. The door opened to a small office space inside. It had some information about rock type Pokemon and even a bit about Mt. Moon. There was a wall with a big picture of Brock (omg Brock in real life! weird!) and a list of those who earned the BoulderBadge. It wasn't a short list. Gary's name wasn't on it yet. Ha!

There was a reception desk so I lined up behind the queue. Most of the trainers were older than me. Uhh… older than this body. Well, I guess I have to accept the fact that I'm 10 years old now. So yeah, older than me.

The trainers all received a number and went through the doors into the gym space. I was getting excited and nervous.

"May I help the next person in line?" the lady at the reception was very nice, and when I told her I wanted to become eligible for the Badge Battle (as it was called), she explained the rules. I paraphrase below.

To become eligible to schedule up for the Badge Battle, you need to defeat one of Brock's coaches. They will be using two rock type Pokemon. You are allowed to use up to three Pokemon. Only one Pokemon from each trainer can be engaged in battle at a time. The battle ends when a trainer yields or all his/her Pokemon are incapaciated. One healing item is allowed throughout the entire match. If you break these rules, you're disqualified, obviously. Oh, and the sign-up fee is 10000 Pokedollars. If you get defeated by the gym coach today, you have to re-apply. Would I like to sign up for a battle today?

…

That's right. And it TOTALLY makes sense. How else will the gyms in the PokeLeague stop any noob to just come battle every day for free until they get lucky and defeat the gym coaches and leaders?

"Yes," I said. "I'll sign up for a coach battle today."

I handed over the cash to the lady and she gave me a number ticket. Lucky 13. Jeez.

"Go on through those doors there," the lady said, pointing to where all the previous trainers went through. "Good luck!"

Through the doors was a long and spacious hallway with a high ceiling. There was a staff member that checked my ticket and led me to the boys locker room (insert meme here).

"You can lock your stuff up here and bring the Pokemon you're going to use for the battle. Please remember: three Pokemon for this battle and one healing item only."

There were 3 or 4 other trainers also getting ready. They were all older than me. I guess we were all nervous or maybe trying to look tough, because no one said any friendly hellos to one another.

Then suddenly, another trainer came into the locker room from the other door, the door that led to the area where the battles took place. He was visibly upset, with tears of frustration coming down his face. He was also swearing under his breath. He sat down on

one of the empty benches. No one had to ask what happened. He had lost.

After grabbing my starter Pokemons, went out the same doors the guy had come through. It felt like a highschool competition of some sort, the qualification stages (I guess technically this kinda was… exactly that).

The large gym was divided into 3 smaller battlefields, with referees placed beside each one. There was a gym coach at each of the battlefields, and when one battle finished, a new trainer would go to the vacant space. There were also gym coaches on the sidelines that would sub with one another. They were all wearing the brown/ grey Pewter City Gym jackets. Brock was nowhere to be seen, but there were spectator stands with a few local visitors observing the battles. It was an efficient system designed to maximize profit.

Waiting in line, I could see the battles. Most of the challengers were using small Pokemon found in the local area: Rattatas, Pidgeys, Nidorans, etc. They didn't fare well against the toughened Geodudes that were experienced against these types. The Geodudes took the physical hits very well (their bodies are literally rock, guys…), advancing upon the smaller Pokemon until they were close enough to grab and pummel them with their literal rock fists. A simple and brutal tactic. The coaches sometimes switched to Sandshrews that used their sharp claws to attack and tough plating to defend against attacks. Everyone in front of me lost their battles.

I was finally the first in line, waiting for the next vacancy. A staff member came up to me, checked my ticket, and restated the battle rules.

Two Pokemon by the gym coach. Up to three by me. Fight until all are knocked out, or player submission. Battle court is clearly outlined with straight lines (about the size of a tennis court but slightly bigger). If a Pokemon goes out of bounds, that particular Pokemon is given one warning, then disqualified the second time. No time limit, but if a player does not instruct his/her Pokemon to fight, then it is seen as submission after a countdown. Pokemon substitutions must occur using Pokeballs

"The Rattata is no longer able to battle!" a referee shouted from one of the battle spaces. "The player has no more Pokemon fit for battle. The gym coach wins this match. Next challenger, please!"

I saw the player withdraw his Pokemon and shake hands with the gym coach. A different gym coach came down to the area and stood ready, looking at me.

It was time for my first gym battle.

Pewter City Gym (Part 2)

Episode 13: Pewter City Gym (Part 2)

My palms were sweaty, knees were weak, arms were heavy. Yadi yadi yada.

Of course I was nervous. I know it wasn't Brock, and this was only the first gym, but I've never had to do this for REAL, you know, in the flesh. In the games, it's so easy to just give your Pokemon commands, and yes, there are fight (move) animations, but at the end of the day it's just pixels.

Here, everything was real. I've battled before, but this was my first GYM. My heart was beating like crazy and I wasn't sure if I could come out on top. Only one way to find out.

The referee on the sideline counted down loudly: "The battle will start in three, two, one… BATTLE!"

We both threw our Pokeballs at the same time. It was Geodude vs. Bulbasaur.

The gym coach started to speak. "A Bulbasaur, huh? I haven't seen one in a while, most of the time it's Pidgeys or Ratta- HUH?"

You know how in movies or games, the villain or even sometimes the MC just goes on "the talk" and wastes time? Yeah, none of that for me. I had instructed all my Pokemon BEFORE the battles how to react, depending on the Pokemon that they could possibly face.

The strategy I told Bulbasaur was the same as the last time he faced Geodude: he wrapped his vines around both of Geodude's arms and started to slam him on the ground. It damaged Geodude badly.

"Pattern B, Bulbasaur!" I shouted.

Bulbasaur stopped slamming Geodude left and right with his vines extended to the optimal length. Instead, he extended his vines a bit

further and slammed him OUTSIDE the arena boundary. Bulbasaur was careful not to touch the outer boundary with his vines. It was a test of the arena limit rules. I had wondered what would happen if one Pokemon physically forced another to go out of bounds.

"Geodude is out of bounds! He receives his first warning!" The referee shouted. A red hologram counter of 10 seconds popped up in the middle of the battle arena. "Geodude must return to the arena. TEN! NINE! …"

"Geodude, get a grip!" the gym coach shouted. "Get out of there!"

"Press him down and remember the angle, Bulbasaur!" I shouted.

"SIX! FIVE!"

"Urgh!" The gym coach shouted with exasperation and took out his Pokeball. "Return!" The red laser from the Pokeball tried to extract Geodude from Bulbasaur's grip. Cheap move.

"Huh?!" the gym coach gasped in surprise as my Bulbasaur blocked the beam of light from the Pokeball with his body.

Because Bulbasaur didn't belong to the gym coach, the beam did nothing to Bulbasaur.

"TWO! ONE! Geodude was unable to return within the boundary on his own! He is disqualified!" The referee shouted.

The gym coach was visibly livid. This obviously hasn't happened to him from a newbie (or so he thought).

By now the crowd's attention was on this battle. The other battle courts haven't started new matches since ours began.

"Let him go, Bulby," I said, trying out a new nickname. Bulbasaur released his grasp of Geodude, who sullenly floated back towards his trainer.

"The gym coach is down to his last Pokemon!" the referee shouted.

"Alright kid, I see you," the gym coach seemed to get in control of

his emotions, and smirked. "Let's see how you deal with this. Go, Sandshrew!"

I expect him to use Sandshrew, but not one this BIG. It was a MOTHERTRUCKER of a Sandshrew, gigantically big. It probably came up to my chest, and for a Sandshrew, that was huge.

This time, the coach didn't waste time talking either and immediately commanded Sandshrew to curl up into a ball and attack with a tackle. The natural move would've been to tell Bulbasaur to use his vines to attack, or tackle in return. That would've been an amateur move.

"Bulbasaur, PAIN TRAIN," I said. I know, kinda lame, perhaps. But it was two syllables and it rhymed.

Bulbasaured drove his two vines into the ground hard and deep (don't say anything, please) into the ground, parallel and close to one another. Because Sandshrew was coming directly towards him, it was easy to do what he wanted next. The ball that was Sandshrew contacted the vine "rails" and he launched off the makeshift ramp and out of the arena boundaries.

"Sandshrew is OUT OF BOUNDS!" the referee shouted. "He receives a warning!"

But this time, without any fetters on him, Sandshrew was able to return within bounds.

The gym coach was mad, but kept a cool head. He realized that balling up wasn't the way to go with Sandshrew.

"Claw your way towards him, Sandy!"

Sandshrew used his sharp little claws (good thing he wasn't a Sandslash yet) and started advancing menacingly towards Bulbasaur. It was enough.

I withdrew my Bulbasaur into his Pokeball and threw out the second.

"Pattern C, Squirtle," I instructed.

Squirtle got down on his four legs and got down, lowering his center of gravity. He half extracted his head all the way into his shell.

Just as a side note, all my Pokemon and I figured out a system (which got more elaborate and better as time went by) so that even if they lost sight of the opposing Pokemon, they can determine the relative position and distance (and later, angle of elevation and depressions) from their current location. For example, the first branch of protocol was audio cues. "Six-Twenty-Flat" or "Six-Twenty-Zero" meant that the opponent was at the relative six O'clock (directly behind), twenty feet away, "flat" on the ground or "zero degree of elevation." That's just one example, but I'm not going to give this trade secret away.

Long story short, with audio and sometimes visual cues (e.g. me giving hand and other body signals), I was able to communicate things clearly, quickly, and most importantly, SECRETLY to my Pokemon.

This is how Squirtle was able to keep his vital areas (head) in his hard shell while Sandshrew was advancing with his claw strikes. They were met with the hardened shell like a shield, and could not do any damage.

"Leg sweep, Angle 20, left-2 Delta fourty-three… now!" I calmly communicated.

Squirtle used his left hind leg and did a spinning low sweeping kick on the Sandshrew at my signal. I had timed it when the guard was down, and Squirtle's leg took out both of Sandshrew's legs and he went down on the ground on his back.

But even before Sandshrew hit the ground, I was already giving the next command.

"Pattern 1, force 40%, then move to frame position give 1 take."

To everyone else this was pure gibberish. But what I said to Squirtle was: "Tackle strategy, using only 40% power (because I didn't want Squirtle to accidentally go out of bounds), then move secretly towards the outer edge of the battle area 1 yard away from the line."

Squirtle's tackle did some damage, even at 40% power. I had practiced, with all my Pokemon, tackling and taking tackles. Did you know that professional boxers sometimes train just getting hit to build up their physical endurance? Without going into details, let's just say that all my Pokemon had made multiple visits to the Pokemon Center.

The Sandshrew just barely managed to hold on. He looked hurt.

I wish I could say that the rest of the battle was as exciting as the first few minutes, but it wasn't. The gym coach was overthinking about not having Sandshrew go out of bounds to use Sandshrew's ball attacks, which is actually quite strong (Force equals Mass times Acceleration, and Sandshrew's acceleration is something to note). Without the Rammus-style attacking patterns, which I was prepared for anyways, Sandshrew's tiny claws were no match for Squirtle's first-defend-then-counterattack strategy. Even with tiny legs, Squirtle was very flexible and quick. Very, very quick.

"Sandshrew is unable to battle! The challenger wins!"

I couldn't help but notice that the audience had grown. Most people were just happy about the exciting battle they had just seen. No doubt it was different from the other battles they'd seen today. Others seemed to be deciding whether the result was because the gym coach was bad, or if I was just good.

The gym coach was mad as hell but still showed good sportsmanship by coming over to shake my hand. A gym staff came and gave me a ticket with the gym leader battle date on it… two weeks later. TWO WEEKS?

I groaned. I didn't want to be stuck here for two weeks. But then I remembered what Alan told me and smiled devilishly.

Pewter City Gym (Part 3)

Episode 13: Pewter City Gym (Part 3)

Turns out worrying about being stuck in Pewter City for two weeks was me overthinking the situation.

As soon as I left the gym, I was harassed by half a dozen trainers who wanted my ticket, my money, or the boasting rights of beating me.

"He's just a kid!" one of the older ones said, mockingly. "I can't believe he beat a coach! I'm sure I can take him on with one Pokemon!" I had Charmander one-hit all of his, instead.

"I'll teach this little brat a lesson," another cocky SOB stepped up. I had Bulbasaur tank all the hits on purpose and then when the opposing Pokemon were too tired, just grab them and throw them into the trainer. Bulbasaur was too op.

I was obviously gentler with the humbler trainers that challenged me with sportsmanship. I just can't stand bullies and assholes.

About an hour later:

"Anyone else? You? No?"

Let's just say that I was richer and my Pokemon were more experienced. I tripled the cash I had on me and even got a chance to use a rotation system to get Caterpie, the two Nidorans, and Pidgey some real battle experience. Each of them was turning into a beast. Caterpie evolved into Metapod after one of the battles and everyone stood in awe. They'd never seen a Metapod that was 10 feet tall. Someone took a picture and later it ended up in a magazine article. The Nidorans were becoming quite the speedsters, and after learning how to tackle from Bulbasaur, they were also learning how to take on opponents much bigger than them. I taught Pidgey to peck and use his talons and not just to rely on gust or flying moves.

In the evening I had some time to train with my main fighting team. Then afterwards, I spent some time testing some theories out. With Pokemon having such amazing inherent abilities, it seemed like such a missed opportunity to not experiment to see if they could be used for more practical, non-fighting purposes.

I had Bulbasaur grab things, hold onto trees and swing himself, roping his vines together to make it thicker and stronger, etc. He could climb tall trees by wrapping his vines around a branch, lifting himself up to it, then repeating the process. Kinda useful if I wanted to hide my bag high up in the tree or something, I dunno. He could even lift me with his vines, although he wasn't quite strong enough to do so with ease. I got half a foot above the ground before Bulby gave up. With smaller Pokemon, he had no problems. Cutting down apples with his razor leaf was a breeze.

With Charmander, I tried different things to make his flames stronger, adding accelerants, feeding him different foods, etc. It seems like the better his physical condition, the stronger his flame. His concentration increased and he learned to control his flame better. I even cooked instant ramen over it. I could definitely survive in the wild. His claws were also really sharp, as I've talked about before. It seemed like every time he sharpened them, they grew out to be stronger than before.

Squirtle obviously was the best when he was near or in a body of water. It turns out like other water-type Pokemon, Squirtle is able to distill water to make it clean enough to drink. I wasn't brave enough to try this, though. His water gun was becoming stronger, more accurate, and prolonged. He can stay below water for long periods of time without coming up, and could even hear me if he wasn't diving too deeply. He could easily ambush anyone walking nearby when he was underwater.

One of my theories was also that HMs were a BS game mechanic and wouldn't exist in this world. I told Charmander to cut down small branches and he did it with ease. Bulbasaur couldn't move a large fallen trunk (there were no large boulders to test), but I could see that once he evolved and became stronger, it would be easy for him (he could also just lean into it with his massive body as Venusaur, I presumed). We found a pond deep enough for me to swim in so I

tried holding onto Squirtle's shell, but he wasn't strong enough to carry my weight and kept on sinking. A similar issue with Pidgey who tried to lift me by grabbing a sturdy stick I was holding above my head, but obviously he couldn't generate enough lift to take me off the ground. So obviously, cutting, "strength," surf, and fly were all inherent abilities of Pokemon, but their present physiology and lack of strength was what was stopping them, and not the lack of knowledge.

The next day I went back to the gym, and there was already a crowd. When they saw me, they gathered around me. The ones I've already defeated demanded a rematch, and the ones that haven't seen me battle couldn't believe that a little guy like me destroyed all of the older trainers. I made more money during the next hour. I didn't even need to go back to the Pokemon Center because I kept on winning potions from battles that I used on my Pokemon because I couldn't carry them anyways. Some of the trainers even ran to the Pokemon Center and came back to challenge me again (which I accepted for free money).

The biggest gain was winning a Gym Leader Challenge ticket that was scheduled for the next available date, the day after tomorrow. It came from this especially cocky dude that had a Nidorino. He was able to use the relatively stronger Pokemon to defeat the other local trainers, so he had every reason to believe he'd beat me.

"There's no way you can defeat my Nidorino," he said. "Let's go, one-vs-one!"

We agreed to use only one Pokemon each, and no items. He must've expected me to use one of my starters (which are my strongest Pokemon, let's be real), so the expression of genuine surprise and massive insult on his face was a pleasure to see when I whipped out my hardened Metapod from my pocket.

I had Metapod harden multiple times, and the dude had Nidorino try tackling at first, then charging head-on with his horn until the poor Pokemon's horn broke off. I don't think he knew that on the previous night, I had my Pokemon take turns using Metapod as a punching bag for hours. The Nidorino had no chance.

The other trainers stopped challenging me after this.

I spent the rest of the time leading up to the Gym Leader Battle training my Pokemon and getting them prepared for the battle.

Pewter City Gym (Part 4)

Episode 14: Pewter City Gym (Part 4)

No one challenged to a battle on the day of the Gym Leader Battle. They all knew I'd turn them down anyways.

I went in the gym, checked in with the receptionist, and prepared for my battle in the locker room. Similar to the coach battle, today's contest was limited to me using 3 Pokemon, and Brock using up to 2. No items were allowed. Refer to my previous narrative for the other details.

After a few minutes, a staff member came to escort me, and told me to stand on a platform in a small room.

"Keep your arms and legs inside," she said.

I was just about to ask "inside what" when the platform started to rise, like an elevator. It was very Hunger Games-esque. I came up to the sound of cheering and loud spectator noises.

It wasn't a full blown-out crowd like it was in the anime, but there was a good number of spectators in the seats. Most of them were Brock fans, of course. There were, however, a fair number of people that were looking at me. They weren't cheering at all, but were studying me with something akin to antagonism… or fear.

I noticed immediately that the boundaries of the battlefield were significantly bigger than the coach battles. It was like those middle school PE classes when your teacher uses the whole game instead of half the gym, you know? This felt more like an entire basketball court, official NBA size, but slightly wider.

Brock was already standing at his end of the trainer zone, arms crossed and with a confident smile. Judging by his smile, he seemed much more humble than his coaches.

The referee/announcer didn't waste her time. Over the PA system

her voice rang out.

"This is an official Pokemon League battle between Pewter City Gym Leader Brock and a challenger! Brock will use up to 2 Pokemon, and the challenger is allowed to use up to 3. No items are allowed during battle!"

So on and so forth. Same as before.

"START THE BATTLE!"

"Go, Geodude!" Brock shouted, throwing his Pokeball. A Geodude came out. He looked different from all the other Geodudes I've faced in the past few days. It was only slightly bigger than the others, but seemed much more focused and ready. Its eyes were sharp. I could definitely tell that it was more battle-hardened and well-trained.

(By the way, a Geodude is a weird Pokemon. He just kinda floats in the air. I honestly think he should be part flying type).

"Let's go Bulby!" I brought out my boy.

"Geodude, use tackle!" Brock shouted.

Bulbasaur stood still, waiting for Geodude to reach his maximum velocity, then moved out the way at the last possible second, before contact was made. Geodude went flying past Bulbasaur, and was about to decelerate when Bulbasaur pushed him in the same direction with his vines. Geodude went crashing into the ground really hard.

Imagine if someone was committed to full-speed tacking you (don't try this at home), but instead of letting him hit you, you move out of the way and push their back. His original velocity and the velocity of your push gets added into the same direction, and he goes high-fiving the pavement with his face.

There were sympathetic "oohs" from the crowd, the kind you say when you just witnessed someone faceplant and it looks painful.

"Geodude, get back up before Bulbasaur attacks you- huh?"

I think everyone in the building expected Bulbasaur to not give Geodude any time to recover. Geodude was visibly hurt, as evidenced by his wincing, but when he got back up, Bulbasaur was totally ignoring him. Instead, Bulbasaur was standing at a particular spot of the battlefield, releasing a bunch of leech seed spores from his bulb. Once he was done, he moved on to another part of the field, doing the same thing.

Geodude was confused, and floated still. And I didn't even use confusion, HA!

Brock was equally confused, and he didn't know what to do in this situation. I'm sure the usual challengers he faced had their Pokemon go straight into full combat. In this case, Brock's Pokemon had much more experience dealing with this kind of situation, and had higher defensive skills and abilities. Why fight your enemy on his terms?

Bulby was done with leech-seeding 3 of the 4 pre-determined spots when Brock finally snapped out of it.

"Geodude, don't let the seeds hit you!"

Geodude floated out of the way, and when Bulby went running to the last spot, coincidentally towards Geodude's direction, the rock Pokemon actually moved away from him.

Bulbasaur leech-seeded the last of the spots that we planned on. Have you ever played Harvest Moon, the video game? You know how you have your character stand in the middle of the 3 by 3 area and seed the area? Imagine that's what Bulbasaur did, covering the entire field with leech seeds.

"Geodude, good job, none of the seeds hit you, ha!" Brock smiled. "Bulbasaur looks tired, tackling again!"

It was true. The battlefield had been quite big, and despite the special training I did with Bulbasaur, covering the surface area of such a big space with leech seeds made Bulbasaur tired.

"Look, Geodude can float over the seeds!" I heard one spectator shout from the stands.

"Haha, what a bad play!" Another critiqued my strategy.

"Oh~ no~" In feigned panic, I recalled Bulbasaur into his Pokeball safely.

"Go, Charmander!" I shouted. Charmander immediately started to sprint towards Geodude.

"Geodude, watch out for his flame!" Brock shouted.

Charmander started to whip his flame towards Geodude.

"Dodge and counter, Geodude!" Brock shouted.

Geodude floated over to evade where Charmander's tail was projected to go, when Charmander suddenly stopped the attack and spun the other way, swiping at Geodude's eyes with his claws.

Since Geodude was already moving out of the way of the tail, the direction of his movement was telegraphed. It was easy for Charmander to land the critical hit. Geodude could not open his left eye.

"Straft 90 Right, Combo 42!" I said.

Brock heard my instructions to Charmander, but he couldn't react because he had no idea what I was talking about. It was one of the funniest things in this Pokemon world, that trainers would depend on verbal commands without secret codes.

Charmander quickly knocked out Geodude by always turning towards Geodude's left side, thereby always being in the blindspot. Charmander's flurry of claw jabs and hooks were too much for Geodude. At one of the punches, he couldn't get up from the ground. The crowd became silent, incredulous at what they'd just seen.

"Geodude is unable to battle! Brock will use his second and last Pokemon!" The referee shouted.

"Let's do this Onix!" Brock brought out his main Pokemon.

"Woah!" There were shouts and cheers from the crowd.

"It's THE Onix!" an especially avid fan commented.

It was a particularly strong looking Onix, slightly darker in color than all the other Onixes that I'd later see in the future as well. Later I heard that it was the leader of a den of Onixes that lived in the heart of Mt. Moon. Brock had gone and battled for 2 days before finally being about to catch him.

"He almost never uses this Onix in public!" another fan shouted, excited.

So from what I gathered, this was Brock's special Onix that he almost never uses for gym battles, because he never had to. He must've changed his selection of Onix after seeing how Charmander defeated Geodude with ease. Alan told me this might happen when I talked to him on the day the night before, when I told him I was going to finally battle Brock.

"You know the Gym Leaders aren't really using their best team, right?" Alan said.

I didn't say anything, because it was different from the games. In the games, the gym battles get progressively harder (in terms of gym Pokemon levels and stats) because it takes into account the progression of the player. You start with Pewter City, and you train and get strong enough to eventually defeat Elite Four. But not every "real" Pokemon trainer starts from Pallet Town like I did. Some are born in different towns and might start there. It didn't make sense that their gyms would be much harder to earn a badge from.

"When you register with the reception, they check how many badges you have, and the gym leaders go easy or harder on you depending on your achievements to date," Alan explained. "No, you can't lie, because they check your progress at the Pokemon League anyways. You are registered under your own unique identity."

So back to Brock: he had prepared one of his not-so-hard Geodude and Onix team, but after seeing how I dealt with Geodude, he changed his plans and sent out one of his best Pokemon: this darker

Onix. It seemed longer and harder than the others.

"Onix, body slam!" Brock shouted.

The giant rock snake put all of his weight on his tail, raised his head/torso really high in the air, then came slamming down towards where Charmander was standing.

It happened in the blink of an eye, and if it wasn't for my non-verbal commands, Charmander might not have been able to dodge it.

Body slam? It was more like just… slamming down with his body. It was a brutal attack.

As previously instructed, Charmander started running towards Onix's eyes, but he had a lot of ground to cover, due to the sheer size of the rock-hard snake.

"Come back up for another one!" Brock shouted.

Before Charmander could even get near his face, Onix raised himself again. Charmander was suddenly without a target, as Onix's tail was all the way at the end of the field. By the time Charmander could get there, the second slam would fall down.

"Click B, Pattern 8!" I shouted, and Charmander immediately went to the corner of the field, to my right.

As Onix came crashing down, Charmander had already been in a sprint to the other corner to my left. Onix tried to change the direction, but of course he couldn't. You try standing on your mattress, start falling down face-first, then try to change the direction mid-fall.

One Charmander was clear of where Onix would land, he immediately jumped towards me. The crowd gasped and Brock's eyes widened a bit at Charmander's supposedly dumb move of going out of bounds. But I held up my Pokeball just in time to recall my Pokemon.

While this was happening, Onix suddenly screeched in pain.

Pewter City Gym (Part 5)

Episode 16: Pewter City Gym (Part 5)

Everyone, including Brock and the referee, were so gobsmacked by Charmander launching himself out of bounds towards me that they all missed me throwing out a different Pokeball as I was recalling Charmander.

I had hurled this other Pokeball above Onix's head as hard as my 10 year-old body could. Because Charmander had been near me, Onix's head landed near me as well. I had felt the impact of the slam create the massive vibrations beneath my feet. I don't want to think about what would've happened to Charmander if he was unable to dodge the attack.

Anyways, from this other Pokeball, Squirtle had come out, mid-air, above Onix's head. Since Onix just landed on the ground and couldn't get back up immediately, he was a sitting duck (sitting rock snake) for Squirtle's water gun.

"Try to soak up as much as you can, Squirtle," I had said, just an hour before, in the bathtub at my Bed and Breakfast. He had comically inflated, having soaked up water to his limits. His little body bloated up like a water balloon. His face was like a big puffer fish. My Pidgey had collapsed from laughing.

"What's that? Oh no, don't worry about being unable to walk, Squirtle," I had told him. "When you come out of the Pokeball, you'll be in the right place. Just unload about half of the water."

And so it was, after an hour, Squirtle had a free shot of water gun directly towards Onix's eyes (this is what I tell my Pokemon to aim for unless otherwise instructed). Gravity did its work as well, and the water did its damage.

"Onix!" Brock shouted in concern as the big rock snake raised its body and writhed in the air, in pain.

Squirtle was no longer on the ground. He had shrunk down to his regular size and was ready for battle, which was still not over. Although he had taken a water gun to the face, Onix was still able to battle, and had raised his head towards the ceiling. From this angle, there was no way Squirtle's water gun would reach Onix's face.

"Next phase, Squirtle," I said.

Squirtle started running towards Onix, who was still standing up on his tail.

"Keep your head covered, Onix!" Brock said, and as Squirtle used water gun as close to an upwards 90 degrees angle as he could, the water made contact with Onix's body only. It did some damage, but the big Onix could still take it."

"Onix, tail swipe and then dive!" Brock shouted.

Onix swung his massive tail across the ground, and Squirtle had to jump as high as he could to dodge it. As he did, Onix "dived" into the ground, burrowing his enormous body out of sight somewhere under the battlefield. It was explained to me later that a certain space beneath and above the battlefield is considered fair battle boundaries. As long as the burrowing or flying Pokemon wasn't just wasting time, it was accepted as a fair battle strategy.

"It seems like you know about Pokemon types," Brock said to me.

OMG, Brock is doing "the talk!" You only see it in anime or movies, where the opponent spends time explaining stuff to the MC and then gets owned. Oh, Brock, not you too!

"You may have learned that water type Pokemon have a natural advantage over rock types, and I'll give it to you that the first attack was very effective. But now that Onix is underground there's nothing much you can do!" Brock smiled. To be fair, it wasn't a cocky smile. Perhaps a smile of 'whatcha gon' do next?'

"What's Squirtle doing?" one spectator asked.

Everyone was collectively confused once again, seeing how Squirtle gave zero attention to Onix somewhere under the ground. Instead,

he was running around the entire battlefield in the optimum route, covering every square inch of water, which he was spraying like a fountain. It was like the shower mode on your garden hose.

Satisfied that his job was done, Squirtle gave me a nod, and then I switched him out with Bulbasaur again.

Having recovered decently in the Pokeball, Bulby now tried to sense Onix's subterraneous movements using his four paws flat on the ground.

"Ha!" Brock said, "Are you trying to feel the tremors to detect where Onix will strike from? That only works if he's the ONLY thing that vibrates. But what if the entire ground shakes?"

I'm not sure if it was Brock's personality or powers-that-be that was making Brock start "the talk," but he sure was going off.

In any case, Brock was right. The entire ground was shaking, making it difficult for Bulbasaur to detect where Onix was going to strike from. Bulbasaur would've been in a lot of trouble...if that's what he was trying to do. Instead, Bulby had his vines out, touching two corners of the battlefield with it.

Onix came out of the ground just below Bulbasaur, knocking him up high in the air. It really was a devastating technique, I have to give it to Brock. Everyone gasped in shock and surprise as Bulbasaur was visibly hurt, wincing.

'You've activated my trap card,' I thought in my head. It was too cheesy to say out loud.

The momentum of the strike knocked Bulbasaur high into the air, but because he was anchored down to the ground, he flew off on a 45 degree angle, then came down underneath Onix. Think of throwing a tennis ball that's tied down on top of a flag pole, then throwing it up at an angle. It'll come swinging back around, right?

Oh, you want to know how Bulbasaur was able to grab the GROUND with his vines, right? 'Cause that's not possible?

You're right. He didn't grab the ground. He grabbed the net of leech

seeds that he had thrown out earlier that was harmlessly lying on the ground, until Squirtle had gone around watering all of them just a few minutes before. Activated by the water, the seeds had grown and started growing, covering the ground like ivy plants on walls. But unlike regular ivy, the leech seeds grew out into really strong vines, connecting with each other and creating a veritable web of plants.

It was these vines that Bulbasaur had grabbed onto, and now that he had come swinging around UNDER Onix (who was still in the air), Bulby shot out two more vines and grabbed the other two corners of the web. So picture this: a giant web of leech seed vines that was roughly rectangular in shape, the corners of which were secured by Bulbasaur as if he had a parachute over his head. And between Bulbasaur and this deadly parachute was...poor Onix. He had no chance.

"Reel 'im in, Bulby!" I shouted.

Onix was in the air and he was still going upwards. There was nothing he could do except to faceplant into the leech seed web. All Bulbasaur had to do was literally just detract his vines that were holding on to the four corners. They folded nicely and then entangled all over Onix. Bulbasaur didn't even have to pull Onix down (he wasn't strong enough to do this yet anyways) since gravity took care of the whole thing. Onix came crashing down, and then the leech seed started to… well, leech. He was like a snake caught in a web that he couldn't get out of.

There was a faint green glow over the web of the leech seed vines, and you could see that Onix was in pain like he was getting tazered. The more he wiggled, the tighter the webs became. Meanwhile, Bulbasaur was being recharged by Onix's energy.

I saw Bulbasaur's bulb open a bit with a glowing light inside when...

"Enough!" Brock shouted. "You win."

"Brock has forfeited! The challenger wins!" The announcer over the PA shouted.

It was my first Gym win.

I honestly remember very little of what happened after the victory against Brock. I do remember that he came over to shake my hand.

"You're going to go far, kid," he said, even though he was only 15 years-old himself.

The crowd was still much shocked over what they had seen, and looked at me with awe and suspicion. (I was SUS!)

Brock took me into a private room and there was a bit of paperwork I had to sign. Then I got the Boulder badge.

The octagonal edges glistened with a pleasant gray chrome glint when I held it at different angles of the light. It had a unique identifying serial code on the back and Brock explained that it was to be registered under my name: "Ash Ketchum."

"Can I also register an alias?" I asked.

"Sure," Brock said. "What will it be?"

"... RED," I said. "I'll go by Red."

Route 3

Route 3

Brock told me that because I had earned the Boulderbadge, I could sign up to receive training from him.

"It seems that you're very skilled as a trainer already," he said. "But I could still offer some insights."

So I came back the day after and Brock showed me some skills and training exercises my Pokemon could do to increase defensive techniques. It was invaluable knowledge. By the end it seemed even my little guys could take some rough tackles, but most importantly, my main fighting group was tankier than before. Halfway through the training my Weedle evolved into Kakuna, and together with Metapod, served nicely as punching bags (don't worry, I kept an eye on them so they weren't being too abused).

There was still plenty of daylight after training with Brock, so I grabbed all my stuff, got my team in tip top shape, and started for Route 3. On the way, I went to the local Pokemart and got a bunch of empty Pokeballs. I also had the foresight to grab an additional bag for all these extra Pokeballs. I was going to catch a lot of new Pokemon.

The Pokemart, like the Pokemon Center, was a fun place to browse because there were so many merchandise that were unique to this world, and I had never seen them before. There was a lot of Pokemon food, medicine, and accessories. People enjoyed dressing up their Pokemon with clothes or pins, etc. There were also Pokemon toothbrushes, wet wipes, and other things that one might associate with pets and livestock. It really confirmed the idea that they were living, breathing beings that I needed to take care of.

The Pokemart was also a place for people stuff. They had magazines on Pokemon trivia, training tips, and latest Pokemon League news. Every monthly issue also published names of trainers who earned which badges as well. Some articles of clothing, the

most notable of which was a magnetic belt that held Pokeballs quite securely. I purchased one to more conveniently access my Pokemon. There was also camping gear, and I grabbed a good flashlight for the upcoming Mt. Moon trip.

Snacks and ready-to-eat meal packages were the best at the local Pokemart. It had a whole array of different types of food, all quite delicious and easy to prepare (usually by adding boiling water, which was easy to take care of with Squirtle and Charmander).

"Is there anything else we could get for you?" The store cashier asked.

"Oh yes," I remembered. "Do you guys have earplugs for people? ...And for Pokemon?"

Thusly prepared for the next leg of the journey, I set out to Route 3, which, I judged, would take about 3 hours to hike all the way through, and possibly more if I took my time to battle and catch new Pokemon.

On the route I felt that the trainers were significantly better than those I faced by the Pewter City Gym, and I think this was likely a result of these trainers being the ones who have also beaten Brock, or at least his coaches. For those who haven't even beaten the coach, they usually stuck in town to get stronger before being out on the official routes.

Most of these trainers were polite and gracious in their defeat. There was a particularly mean girl, though, who just wouldn't handle it.

"YOU CHEATED!" She yelled.

I'm not even sure how I could have cheated having my Pidgey destroy her Rattata with one gust move.

"You're so weak!" Now she turned to her Rattata, quivering in fear of her. "You're useless!"

She started kicking dirt at her Rattata. Nasty little brat, this girl.

I did tell her to stop and advised her to treat her Pokemon with

kindness, but unfortunately, I could not get her to change her ways. This was just one of the realities of this world.

One particularly good trainer had a Zubat that used supersonic rays on Charmander, who was not entirely "confused," but got disoriented due to his advanced sense of hearing. It was a good thing that Zubat was too weak to follow up with a finishing move.

"Wow, tough Charmander!" the big bearded guy said, after the fight. "That move knocked out all the other Pokemon!"

He was a nice teddy bear of a man who marked down on my interior map of Mt. Moon where he caught his Zubat. I later caught one there.

Route 3 offered species of Pokemon that I hadn't seen in Viridian and Pewter. It gave me and my Pokemon opportunities to create new strategies. Spearow and Mankey were two especially aggressive Pokemon that came after me. Or the food in my backpack, rather. I caught one each after knocking them out with Squirtle. He was getting better with conserving water within his body, and his water gun was becoming stronger. Once I had caught them, they were both obedient and subdued.

Once, walking along Route 3, I caught up to my Rattata that I told to walk ahead of me. He was unhurt, but was knocked out on the ground. Something had put it to sleep.

I quickly reached into my pocket for earplugs and plugged my ears. I also put Rattata back into his Pokeball and brought out Bulbasaur, who already had his earplugs in.

The Jigglypuff was just chilling behind a bunch of bushes. I must've made more noise than I wanted, because my efforts to sneak behind her didn't work. She immediately turned towards me and Bulbasaur and started to sing. The effect was powerful, even with the earplugs on. You just feel this invisible force that presses down on your mind and body, trying to get it to sleep.

Good thing I had one Nidoran bite my ankle and the other bite Bulbasaur's (then they fell asleep). The pain kept me and Bulbasaur

awake long enough for the vine whip to connect with the Jigglypuff. The constriction of the vines around her body made it impossible for her to sing any more. A couple of slams on the ground, and she was easily caught.

And finally I ran into a small Pikachu. She was smaller than average (according to my Pokedex), so I was thinking maybe I would pass on her for a bigger one I saw next. Then the Pikachu used thundershock and I changed my mind.

You don't see the electric wave as much as feel it in the air. It was hard to believe the power that came out of this little Pikachu. She was a fiesty one that put up a fight. She stood her ground and kept on sending out electric moves even as she started growing tired. She kept on growling. I considered using Charmander or Bulbasaur, but I decided to take a different approach. Jigglypuff was more than happy to sing her heart out and the Pikachu fell asleep.

I battled half a dozen more trainers the rest of the way and picked up some more tips, items, and money.

It was with this growing team and wealth I finally reached the Pokemon Center at the base of Mt. Moon entrance and got a room to rest up for the night.

Mt Moon (Part 1)

Mt. Moon (Part 1)

The majority of people I met in the common areas of the Pokemon Center were understandably people who were planning to go through Mt. Moon towards Cerulean City. There were small kiosks that offered guided tours of the natural wonders of the mountain caves.

I also learned that unlike the games, the main cave path was well maintained and well-lit with electricity, so that safe passage was quite guaranteed. The issue was that there are hundreds of side branches that lead to other cave paths, and each of these branches off into dozens and dozens more and so in effect you have a fractal of potentially infinite caves that are impossible to fully explore and map out. Mt. Moon didn't get its name for no reason. It was a humongous piece of rock. Legends say that it is the dead remains of a massive ancient Pokemon god, but no way for anyone to verify this.

Anyways, the safe passage was to take an 8-hour hike, and I wasn't about to pass by my chance to explore the crevices of the caves. I purchased a map of the main passages that have been explored, and also a small beacon machine not unlike GPS.

"The machine will keep a track of the path you took," the salesman demonstrated. "Most of the paths nearby have been explored, as you can see. If you press this button, in the case of an emergency, others can see you on their machines and could come to your aid."

So I started off on the main path for about an hour, with a small group of people, then slipped out into the place where the bearded man showed me I could catch a Zubat (they're not so populous on the main path, due to their sensitivity of light).

In this world, it was so much more convenient to have my Pokemon out of their Pokeballs than to keep them confined. There was no reason (legal or otherwise) for me to keep all of them in my

Pokeball, except to bring my bigger Pokemon (which I caught later) through small rooms, etc. This is why I had my Rattata and Nidorans out to scout out ahead, and Mankey was on my shoulders, holding my flashlight with his tail. Charmander was guarding the rear, just in case there were wild Pokemon stalking us to steal my food. I used all my Pokemon, using their naturally given abilities here in the wild. They loved it.

I spent a good 2-3 hours in the first branch I went into, letting my Pokemon tell me where to find wild ones. Their perception (hearing, sense of smell) were so much better than mine, so why would I waste my time trying to track wild Pokemon myself, right?

I caught a Geodude of my own (and dude, did he love to eat rocks), and a Paras (whose ability to find edible wild mushrooms meant that I could easily find a good source of nutrition out in the wild).

We all ate a snack and took a nap in a small cave with three sides covered by the walls (you can't sneak up on me), except for Pidgey and Spearow who I left on sentry duty. They surprisingly got along well. Afterwards I returned to the main path and went down another hour or so, then ventured off into another side branch passage. I had already decided that my main goal on this trip was to catch as many new Pokemon as possible, and continue my training regiment with my main fighting team.

I set some of Bulby's leaves on fire with Charmander's fire and threw it down a burrow hole, smoking a Sandshrew out of its hiding spot. I caught it easily after my rat crew (Rattata and Nidorans) gave him a three-way tackle. Don't worry, I used a potion on him afterwards.

All this time, I had been looking for an Onix. Due to its large size, it doesn't really inhabit the small passages that I've been exploring. I told my Zubat to use his echolocation to find larger passages, or large, empty spaces. No luck. I didn't want to go too deep into the unexplored paths, so I doubled back to the main passage.

At the halfway point of the main passage, between Route 3 and Route 4 entrances, there is a small marketplace and some shacks at which you can rent a bunk. Due to the size of Mt. Moon and its tourist attractions (namely being able to catch certain Pokemon),

these designated rest areas were created. Pokemon battles were banned here, due to there being no Pokemon Centers nearby. There was running water and street-food (cave food!) vendors that served hot and fresh food. Since I had not been able to hike and camp out like this in my previous life due to my ill health, this was something I particularly enjoyed. I still didn't know how this afterlife was possible, or if it was all real, but as long as I was in this new reality, I was going to enjoy it to the fullest.

The co-ed bunk bed rooms were a good place to exchange information about where to find Pokemon in Mt. Moon. Luckily, no one here seemed to know my feats back in Pewter, so I was not bothered by any of them. I did have to pretend, however, that I hadn't caught a Zubat, a Paras, a Geodude, AND a Sandshrew in the past 4 hours, so that none of them would pester me with a million questions. One of the trainers, however, did see a Clefairy. She had everyone's attention.

"I know a lot of people claim to have seen a Clefairy," she said. "But I have proof. Look at this picture."

It was blurry and taken from far away, but it still showed the silhouette of the pink body of a Clefairy, and her brown-tipped ears. It was undeniable.

"Woah!" a trainer shouted in envy.

"Where did you see it?" another asked.

I was also listening in carefully.

"Ha! Trade secrets, yo," the girl said. "It's gonna cost each of you if you wanna get the info."

Clever girl.

She named a price that was at the high end of reasonable and when everyone (including me) paid up, sent us a GPS location to our trackers. It was off into one of the passages that lead upwards. Since Clefairies and Clefables were known to enjoy moonlight, it made sense. Perhaps the one she saw was a stray that ventured

down near the main path.

Once everyone went back to their bunks, satisfied with the GPS locations, I saw the girl walk out of the room, so I followed her.

She was at one of the store vendors, looking alternatively at a bunch of Pokemon potions, Pokemon food, and ready-made meals for people. She was rubbing her stomach, trying to appease the pangs of hunger. She looked at the money from the trainers. It was not little, but it wasn't enough to get everything. Everything in the Mt. Moon passage was more expensive than in the towns, because they've been marked up with location premium. It was difficult to bring everything into this camp.

I reached in front of her to grab 4 potions, a medium pack of Pokemon food, and a bento box. She turned to look at me in surprise.

At this point I'd made so much money from all the Pokemon battles I'd won easily with my overpowered team. I paid for the goods and the vendor put them in a plastic bag. I held it out in front of her but didn't say anything.

"I already told you where I saw the Clefairy!" she said angrily.

"I know."

"I- I don't need your charity!" she said, trembling with anger.

"I know," I said.

Tears formed in her eyes, that still looked at me with suspicion and anger.

"Take it. Your Pokemon need it, and you shouldn't have to decide between you and them."

She didn't take it, but couldn't turn it down, either. She started crying silently, her face facing the ground and covered by her long black hair.

I took the plastic bag and put it into her hand. It closed over it.

I didn't say anything and walked away. I turned back and saw her still crying with the bag firmly held in hand.

This is how I met my second best friend in this Pokemon world.

Mt Moon (Part 2)

Mt. Moon (Part 2)

I purposely got up earlier than the others in the bunk room and quietly snuck out in the dark. I arrived at the GPS location and saw the rock formation as I had seen in the blurry photo of the Clefairy. My Charmander growled at something behind me.

It was the girl from yesterday, shily hugging her arms.

"..." She didn't say anything. There was an Oddish at her feet. It looked up at her with loving eyes. It was clear to see how the girl treated her Pokemon.

"Am I in the right place?" I broke the awkward silence.

"Uh, yeah!" She seemed relieved that I said something to her first.

She awkwardly walked past me with a blushing red face.

"F- follow me!" she pointed at a particular passage that branched off upwards.

"I'm Erina, by the way," she introduced herself.

"You can call me Red."

We walked upwards with my Mankey guiding the way with my flashlight. The path flattened out a bit, but then we came to a small hole that we couldn't fit through.

"I followed the Clefairy and couldn't go any further," she explained.

I looked inside with the flashlight and it seemed possible for us to walk on the other side.

"Geodude, snack time!" he was happy to munch down the rocks, making the hole big enough for us to squeeze through.

As Geodude was munching, the girl said something softly, too quietly for me to hear.

"Sorry, what's that?"

"Thank you," she said. "For last night."

"Don't worry about it."

"My Oddish...," she said. "She's okay now, but it was pretty bad."

Her Oddish peeked at me with curiosity from behind her legs. I waved hi and she hid behind them again. Ah, a shy one also. Like trainer, like Pokemon, I guess.

"What happened?" I asked.

So apparently there were groups of bullies that broke the "no battle" rules near the main safe pathway of Mt. Moon. They were always in pairs, and they attacked weak-looking trainers only minutes after diverging from the main pathway. They ambushed trainers and mugged them.

"I had a group of three others that I was traveling to Pewter City with," she said. "But they had to rush back to Cerulean to go to the Pokemon Center."

"Why didn't you go back with them?"

"My pendant…" She started to tear up again. "It's a family heirloom."

They had ripped it from her neck even as they took everything of monetary value. I got the impression that these weren't just bullies on the road. This was something more criminal.

I listened to her in silence as she cried a bit more.

Once Geodude made a big enough pathway, we walked up the incline together, even though we hadn't agreed out loud to do so.

It was clear to see, both visually and on the GPS tracker, that this passage had never been explored by people. It was most likely

because of the narrow entrance, but it had something to do with the uphill pathway as well. As I mentioned before the caves in Mt. Moon branch off into dozens of side branches, which each path off into the next dozen, and so forth, so that it was impossible for all of them to be explored. So which ones did those brave enough to venture from the main safe pathway explore? The ones that were easiest to access. The wides, the closest, the least-winding, and flattest paths were the ones people took. This one didn't fit any of those criteria.

Clefairies and Clefables were known to shy away from people, and it was most likely that these paths would lead to their natural habitat.

We eventually came to a dead end, but noticed a hole directly above us, leading to another level. I threw a Pokeball straight up into the hole, and it landed on the floor above. My Mankey came out of it. Then I had my Pidgey take one end of the rope I had purchased back at the Route 3 Pokemon Center, and fly it up to Mankey, who fastened it securely to a sturdy boulder protruding from the ground.

It was difficult for a bunch of kids like me and Erina - who turned out to be eleven - to climb up the rope, but with some help from Bulbasaur's vines (and floating Geodude), we made it up safely.

We had come up to another cave path, and we marked it on our GPS tracker, just in case. We felt a draft of air coming from one direction, which meant that it led outdoors. We decided to head that way.

About half an hour later, we saw flickers of daylight and emerged into a large, semi-spherical space. The ceiling was at least 50 feet high and there was a circular hole at the top, like a skylight. Directly below it, on the ground in front of us, was a flat cylindrical space, not unlike an altar. No… a dance floor?!

Whatever it was, it obviously carried a significance to those who lived here. There were little cave entrances at different levels all around the dome that probably branched out to private living quarters. And this was the large common area.

"Look, over there!" Erina whispered, pointing at one of these holes.

A Clefairy! It was poking its head out, looking around. It was cautious. No, it was afraid.

Afraid? Of what? Erina and I were still hidden in the shadows of the corridor we were in, and the Clefairy wasn't looking at us.

It was looking at… a gigantic hole in the middle of the wall, on the opposite side of where Erine and I poked our heads out. We had not noticed it before, our attention caught by the majesty of this place. But now we saw it, a large whole about 8 feet high, and judging by the rubble by the entrance that contrasted with the overall neatness of this place, was created by intruders. Then we heard voices and dark shadows emerging from this hole.

"How many did we get?" a man said to another figure.

"Twenty-eight," a woman answered.

"That's pretty good, but someone said they saw one still hiding here," the man said. "Best we get it before reporting back to the boss."

They emerged into the daylight coming through the skylight and I saw that they were wearing black uniforms, complete with gray boots, gray gloves, and a red capital R on their chest...HAHAHA IT'S TEAM ROCKET!

Of course in the game, there was Team Rocket in Mt. Moon, placed there as NPCs that provided experience to level up your Pokemon. To see their uniforms in real life, however, was just too funny. Imagine adults (these two looked like they were in their mid 20s, and later I saw people as old as 40s) with gray boots and gloves, with tight black overalls with a giant red R on it.

Still, I wasn't going to underestimate anyone in this world, and thought it would be prudent to maintain stealth. I turned to communicate this to Erina, and saw her trembling.

It wasn't fear. It was... anger!

"Are you okay?" I whispered. I was praying she wouldn't go running out.

"My pendant…" she whispered under her breath and pointed at the girl Rocket.

Even at this distance, I could see the pendant glistening in the sunlight with a mesmerizing green light. It was around the girl Rocket's neck, visible over her uniform.

'Oh no,' I thought, and before I could stop her, Erina was already up and running out into the large dome area.

The Rockets saw her immediately and were on guard.

"Who are you?" the guy Rocket shouted.

"It's you!" the girl Rocket recognized her. "Back for more?"

The Rockets were smirking at Erina and her Oddish. Oddish had a battle-ready angry face on, but the little guy was trembling in fear, probably in memory of what had happened in their last scuffle.

The guy Rocket brought out a Grimer, and the girl Rocket brought out her Ekans. Urgh, why do the bad guys use Pokemon that are archetypically associated with negative things? Grimers and Ekanses need love, too.

If I was alone and wanted to take the Rockets out, I would've flanked them and ambushed them from the shadows. But even though I wasn't obliged in any way, I wanted to protect Erina and her Oddish. They'd been through too much at the hand of these jerk Rockets.

Even as I caught more and more Pokemon, I made sure I knew which Pokeball contained which, using a mise-en-place system. As Grimer and Ekans were ordered to attack Oddish, I reached for all the right Pokeballs and threw them out.

Bulbasaur came out and grabbed Metapod and Kakuna with his vines, placing them directly in the way of the attack. Have you ever played PvZ? They were like the Walnuts. Ekans' fangs connected with the super hard Metapod. The Snake winced in pain and jumped back. Grimer's poisonous/toxic body wasn't that dangerous yet, but whatever toxicity he had was absorbed well by the poison resistance of Kakuna.

At the same time, I had Mankey and Geodude flank and position themselves above the Rockets. They started taking small stones and whipping them at their torsos.

"The hospital, boys, not the morgue!" I shouted at my stone-throwers. I didn't want to murder anyone. Aiming rocks at their heads would be too dangerous.

The Rockets were totally caught off guard. They had other Pokeball on their belts, but couldn't reach them because they had to use their arms to shield themselves from the rocks.

"Ah!" the guy Rocket yelped in pain.

"Ouch!" the girl Rocket yelled.

Erina looked on at this scene with her jaws dropped.

Oddish was hopping in place, excited and happy. She even kicked a pebble at her feet. It connected with the girl Rocket's nose, which started to bleed.

The use of multiple Pokemon was hilarious in the wild. Without the "one at a time" rule of the Gyms and more courteous of battles, there was nothing to stop me from using as many Pokemon as I wanted. The only thing that was holding me back was my own multi-tasking ability, and being able to remember what my Pokemon can do.

I sent out Rattata, Nidoran (boy), Nidoran (girl), and Pikachu, my fastest and most agile team. I told them to sneak down the path the Rockets had emerged from, and report back if they saw backup. I didn't want a whole game of other Rockets coming up.

Without the Rockets giving them direct commands, Ekans and Grimer looked around, baffled and indecisive.

"We give up! Stop!" the Rockets yelled.

I held up a fist and the rock artillery team stopped. Bulbasaur still stood on guard with his dual-shield formation.

But the fight was over. The two Rockets were on the ground, writing in too much pain to put up any resistance.

Mt Moon (Part 3)

Mt. Moon (Part 3)

I had the Rockets in a humble, kneeling position in front of me. They were already disarmed of their Pokeballs, their belts unbuckled and on the ground out of their reach. Grimer and Ekans were also behind them, subdued and under guard by my Pokemon.

The Rockets seemed embarrassed at being defeated by a 10 year-old, but had no choice but to spill their schemes. They were part of a dozen or so Rocket crew that were deployed in Mt. Moon in search of Clefairies and Moon Stones. While carrying out this primary objective, they also did their regular dirty work of mugging, stealing, and Pokemon-napping from trainers, including Erina. In this world, Team Rocket was not the comic relief characters as manifested as Jesse and James in the animated series. They were a real criminal mafia ring, shameless and truly powerful. I was perhaps lucky I ran into these two noobs, instead of the more powerful officers in the organization.

I took my rope and tied them up, taping up their mouths as well. They muffled in protest but my Mankey slapped them on their heads and they were knocked out. I later sent the authorities to apprehend them. Erina explained that most Team Rocket Pokemon were abused and had no choice but to follow their commands of their criminal masters. I released all the Rocket Pokemon and gave them a choice.

"If you want to stay with your trainers," I said," you can go back into your Pokeballs. If you want to return to the wild, you can go."

All of them went free, never once looking back. I didn't catch them myself because I think they belonged in the wild after all this time.

I retrieved the pendant from the girl Rocket and handed it to Erina. She thanked me and teared up a bit again. Oddish was happily rubbing against her leg.

On the guy Rocket I found a small electronic device that had information on their operation.

"What do we do now?" Erina asked.

She was a year older and had known me for only a few hours, but made up her mind that I'd make better leadership decisions. I told you she's a clever girl.

"From their conversation it seems they already captured a bunch of Clefairies, and I'm gonna go after Team Rocket to see if I can free them," I said.

I said that it's probably better if people back on the main passage knew that it was Team Rocket that lurked in the shadows, and not just your regular ol' bullies. She agreed and said she'll go back to warn the others and the authorities. She could probably gather a group of adult trainers as well to come here. They had a vested interest to keep the main Mt. Moon passage safe, since their businesses depended on passerbys.

It was decided that Erina would walk back to the camp and bring reinforcements.

"Be safe!" She shouted, and ran back with her Oddish.

My rat-crew (Rattata, Nidorans, Pikachu) came running back and was showing me on the paper map where the main Team Rocket forces were, when I heard a little chirp (or whimper?) behind me. I turned to find a Clefairy there. She stood at a distance, a bit cautious, but still wanting to come closer.

"Oh it's you," I said, smiling. "I thought you'd be hiding from the bad guys."

I pointed at the hole where I'd seen the Clefairy, then pointed at the two unconscious Rockets. Clefairy seemed to follow what I was saying.

"I'm gonna go rescue your friends," I said. "Do you want to come with me?"

Clefairy smiled and came running into my arms, rubbing her face. It was kinda like being hugged by a cotton-candy memory foam. It was nice.

I strategized with my Pokemon team and headed down the path the Rockets had used.

It did not take long for me to hear the sound of drills and other heavy machinery. I turned the corner, still hidden, to see about half a dozen Rockets drilling into the side of the caves.

I'm sure that some of them had Pokemon that could pack a punch, but I wasn't going to find out. It was already one vs. many, and I needed all the tactical advantage I could get. I was going to go in and and ambush them with all of my Pokemon!

Wait. Why? I could wipe them out with just one. But first, I needed to set it up.

I got my earplugs out.

The combo was very simple. I had my Pikachu sneak to the generator they were using to power their drills. She had no trouble biting through the main power cord, and obviously was immune to the electricity from this process. The Rockets were suddenly engulfed in complete darkness and silence.

"Huh? What's going on?" one of them asked in panic.

"Relax," the leader said. "It's probably that old generator."

One by one flashlights came on and were illuminating the darkness.

"Wait, what's this?"

"It's a Pokemon!"

"It's pink!"

"Is it another Clefairy? Who let it out of the cage?"

"It's a… a Jigglypuff."

"Oh, sh-"

It was too late. I had restricted Jigglypuff from singing all this time, and she had gotten quite frustrated by this. Now, being instructed to "perform" to all the audience members, she was super excited.

"You see the letter "R" on their shirt? That stands for "Rockstar." Uh-huh, that's right, buddy, that's you!" I had told her.

They were all knocked out before they could even respond with their Pokemon.

The clean-up involved getting my stronger Pokemon to move the unconscious Rockets to one place and tying them up with a length of rope I found. I took the precaution of removing all their Pokeballs from their persons.

Once I made sure I was completely safe (and sent out the rat crew on recon), I turned to the cage with the Clefairies. Surprisingly, they weren't all asleep! They seemed to be inherently resistant to Jigglypuff's songs.

I unlocked all the cages containing the Clefairies. They were understandably wary of me and demurred to come out into the open. It was only after the Clefairy that followed me came up on my shoulders and squealed in joy of being united with her friends, that the entire group came out and started smiling and making sounds of happiness.

Not too long afterwards I began to hear the rush of footsteps from the path I had come from. Led by Erina, a dozen or so adults came with their Pokemon, ready to fight Team Rocket, only to find that they were all tied up and unconscious.

"Did… Did you do this?" a man asked, incredulous.

"Are you okay? You're not hurt?" a lady asked with concern.

"I'm okay, but we should call the police for these guys," I said.

"What about the Clefairies?" a teenager asked from behind the group, obviously more concerned about catching a Clefairy than

protecting one.

I turned to look around where they were, but the wild Pokemon were no longer there. I guess they must've scattered at the sound of a larger group.

I gathered my Pokemon and my gear and explained to them that I was going to head out. I had to go to Cerulean City. One of the adults mentioned that Team Rocket must've started drilling from nearby Cerulean (which made sense), so I decided to follow the tunnel that they had conveniently drilled for me. The adults said that they would stay to guard the Rockets until the police came, and the other older kids that came with them wanted to stay just in case the Clefairies "needed help."

I was walking away from the group when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

It was Erina.

"Give me your phone," she said.

"Uh… why?" I asked, handing it over.

She punched her number in and saved it. She gave me a hug. She didn't let go for a while.

"Stay in touch," she said, before we parted.

Out to Route 4

Out to Route 4

I had been walking alone for thirty minutes with Mankey holding up the lantern for me when I noticed that someone was following me. I got Geodude out of his Pokeball and gave him some instructions.

I kept on walking for about five minutes and started to hear some squealing behind me. I ran back towards the sound, ready to attack. But it was just a… Clefairy.

No, THE Clefairy that had escaped Team Rocket and tried to help her friends.

Geodude, like I had instructed him, had pretended to be part of the ceiling until the Clefairy came by behind me. He just dropped down and held Clefairy in a strong grasp.

"Geodude, it's okay, let her go," I said.

The Clefairy looked at me with a sad expression on her face.

"I'm sorry buddy," I tried to comfort her. "I thought you were Team Rocket."

She suddenly winced with fear at the mention of Team Rocket and it pained me to see that.

"Anyways, I don't think you have to worry about them anymore," I said.

I retrieved Geodude into his Pokeball and was walking away when I felt a tug at my pants. The Clefairy was holding onto me. She was smiling.

"What's that, girl? You want to come with me?"

So far I'd been keen to catch every new type of Pokemon I saw, but after seeing how the Clefairies had suffered in the hands of Team

Rocket, I was willing to catch a Clefairy at the next opportunity. But here was one that wanted to come along. I gladly welcomed her to the team.

Before we moved on, however, my new Clefairy kept on pointing to a particular fork in the caves. I took a detour in that direction, and came to a...dead end?

I was very confused but upon close inspection of the walls, I saw that certain rock formations were different from regular dirt and rocks. Mostly gray in hue with glints of silver, it could only be...

Moonstones!

With some help from Geodude, I was able to use the sharp edge of my shovel to retrieve 3 large pieces the size of sweet potatoes.

"Woah! The only one I've seen in real life is the small chipped one at the Museum at Pewter!" Alan later said when I showed him my loot.

Along with Clefairy, it definitely proved to be a source of envy from other trainers.

In the last leg of my journey towards Route 4, I came across a strange nerdy-looking man… No, let's just call him a nerd. I came across a nerd with really thick glasses (not only the frame but also thick lenses so his eyes appeared comically enlarged from my perspective) and a white lab coat.

He was in the middle of the cave so I could hardly avoid him.

"Huh! Who are you?! You're not here to take my fossils, are ya?"

I was thinking "fossils?" when he suddenly attacked me with a Grimer.

I threw 2 selected Pokeballs out, and while the Pokemon were coming out, it hit me.

HAHAHA He's the FOSSIL DUDE!

You know in the games, there's a dude that you beat in Mt. Moon

that offers you a pick of Dome or Helix Fossil? It's this dude!

I laughed throughout the entire battle, but here's how it went:

I had Mankey already carrying the lantern for me, so Mankey, Geodude, and Bulby all grabbed larger rocks and pebbles and started throwing them at Grimer. The slimey (?) body of Grimer was able to soak up some damage, but the combined power of 3 very proficient rock throwers was too much. Grimer started to slow down, and then finally just kinda broke down and became a pool on the ground.

Next was Voltorb, which is a very weird Pokemon to see in real life. Just bigger than a foot in diameter, the Pokeball-shaped Pokemon just kinda rolled around at times, and could launch itself in different directions as well. Later on, speaking to Pokeball experts has taught me that Voltorbs are created when occupied Pokeball experiences catastrophic failure, merging the advanced tech with living flesh (gross). Leaving Pokemon in Pokeballs for too long, or not changing the Pokeball for too long (you can link Pokemon to new Pokeballs at Pokemon Centers) increased the possibility of this happening. Experts are not sure why this happens, given the relatively advanced technology and safety of Pokeballs.

Oh, Voltorb was easy to deal with with Geodude as well. Geodude just grabbed Voltorb and kept throwing him around until the ball-shaped zapper exploded into oblivion. I thought it would result in fragments, but Voltorb maintained his ball shape, just sizzling with heat and smoke, unmoving.

The last Pokemon was Koffing, and I just used Pidgey and Spearow to blow the toxic gas that was being released. Koffing was too slow to land any of his floating tackles, and eventually used up whatever gas reserves he had within his body, and was unable to fight any more.

I went up to the two fossils the Lab Coat Rocket was guarding. One was a fossilized snail-like creature, and the other the noticeable horseshoe crab shape. Both were the size of my open palm.

"Yes, since you've defeated me, you can get the first pick of- hey…

HEY! What are you doing?!" The Rocket protested as I took BOTH fossils and shoved them in my bag.

I turned and stared back at him.

"Oh, uh… I…" He drew back into the corner.

I walked away, leaving him in silence.

Route 4 and into Cerulean City

Route 4 and into Cerulean City

There's nothing remarkable at all about Route 4. No wonder there are almost no serious trainers here. I ran into little kids on the edge of Cerulean City that were trying to catch the stray Rattata or Spearow.

I got one of the "Pokerooms" at the Pokemon Center. I got the medium sized one with better amenities and more space for letting Pokemon out, since I could afford it. The large and deluxe size ones had small pools for your water types, a heat lamp for your cold-blooded monsters, and even a walk-out garden for your grass and birds (there is a tree). I could definitely afford these rooms as well, but I wanted to work my way up in the world.

I let my little guys out and they were very happy to run around, take naps, hang out with one another, and eat all the Pokemon food and snacks (included). I myself took a long, hot bath, during which I started to strategize about my next steps.

As I saw it, there were a few key things I needed to do in Cerulean. First and foremost, Cerulean Gym, of course. That was just a given. Second, I wondered if I was going to run into Gary for a battle. Third, I wanted to check out the bike shop. Fourth, I figured I'd go find Bill's house and see if getting a ticket to S.S. Anne was necessary in this world. Fifth, although I hadn't planned to go in yet, I wanted to see the place where the most powerful Pokemon in this world resided. But of course, before all of these, to go see my new friend Alan.

After a very, very good night's sleep (my furry ones came and cuddled on the bed with me), I followed Alan's directions to locate his family's diner.

"Hey, over here!" I found it easily, since he was poking his head out the door when I turned onto the street. He smiled and waved at me.

His family's restaurant was… huge! It was two floors, and at peak

lunch and dinner times, patrons lined up around the corner. His dad was a humble man who, despite the success at the restaurant, and could afford to hire other people to do it, still cooked as the main chef in the kitchen. Alan's mom was also a nice lady, the front manager, who knew every regular by name.

They both thanked me for helping Alan out, and said I was welcome to eat at their restaurant for free, anytime. After I tasted their food, I was glad that the offer was made. Best diner food I've had, in this life and last combined.

Alan and I went up to the third floor of the restaurant building, which served as his home. I asked him about the surrounding area, especially the area directly North of the city.

"Oh yeah, there IS an entrance to a cave to the North," he said. "People always stay away because the wild Pokemon there are aggressive… abnormally aggressive."

I guessed that it might be because they were under some sort of psychic influence…

"A lot of trainers battle up in Route 24 and Route 25, true," he said. "I was up there last week but lately a lot of unusually mean people showed up, so I stayed in town this week."

So Team Rocket was here, I guess.

"Bill? No, I don't know a Bill, but there is a large mansion at the end of Route 25. It's private property though, so I don't know who lives there. Oh, the delivery guy from our restaurant does make deliveries there from time to time, I remember."

I spent some time showing Alan my newly caught Pokemon, and after some time, left to go to Route 4. I must have spent a good 2-3 hours there, trying to run into any wild Pokemon that would come and fight my Pokemon.

When I felt like some new strategies were well practiced, I headed up North after a quick visit to the Pokemon Center.

It was late afternoon when I came to the bridge that led to Route 24,

and lo and behold, recognized a certain spiky-haired boy of my age coming down the same bridge.

"Hey! It's you!"

With that ever-cocky smirk, Gary approached. He said some rude things, and then tried to force me to battle.

"Let's go, one Pokemon at a time, up to six," he laid out the terms. "Unless you're too scared."

We found an empty field and started our battle. I couldn't remember the details, but I was pretty sure that at this stage, his Pokemon team included a Rattata, Pidgey, Abra, and… well, it was supposed to include one of the starters but I wasn't sure what kind of Butterfly Effect I had on this world. Maybe an Eevee?

As this was more "official" a match than with those versus Team Rocket goons, we agreed on some fair play rules and boundaries.

Gary started off with a Rattata, the one that he had caught first. I had a moment to think of a strategy. Well, more of a decision. Do I blast all of his Pokemon, or do I hold back a bit to just barely win? Or, entirely a different approach: lose on purpose so Gary thinks he's the boss?

Haha, no.

"Go, Rattata!" Gary brought out his first Pokemon. I threw out my first Pokemon, too.

I guess the Gary in this world was destined to be a decent leader, because it was actually one of the better Rattatas I have battled against. The little rat kept his center of gravity low, tucking in the body to make his body more efficient.

…

Too bad neither me nor my Metapod gave a damn.

Gary in Cerulean City (Part 1)

Special shoutout to Mr. Tam and Mr. Mok most of all. Also shoutout to those who actively review and show support.

Gary in Cerulean City (Part 1)

I picked Metapod first because I felt like using my more powerful starter Pokemon was overkill.

All my Metapod had to do was harden and fix himself onto the ground. The little rat tackled and tackled and tackled, then eventually he couldn't take the blows to his own body. He almost flat-out refused Gary's instructions to tackle by the end of the bout. It didn't occur to my proud little "rival," that he could switch Pokemon.

"Urgh! You suck, Rattata!" Gary had to recall his rat.

Never in a thousand years would Gary admit that it was his own lack of strategy and skill that he would lose. It was far easier for him to blame his Pokemon for his losses.

With his Pidgey, he started to use gust and other non-melee moves to battle, and while these actually presented no threat to Metapod (and vice versa), it became clear that I had to change Pokemon to break the stalemate.

It was all too easy for my naturally fierce little Pikachu to destroy his Pidgey. As I mentioned before, this smaller-than-average Pikachu had, by some force of nature that allowed her to compensate for her size, been endowed with amazing electric power. She practically turned the Pidgey into Korean Fried Chicken with one thundershock.

"This is stupid!" Gary muttered, but was forced to take out his Abra.

Abra was difficult to deal with, because he used all his powers to just teleport away whenever Pikachu used thunderbolt. When Pikachu tried to tackle instead, Abra repeated the tactic.

I was going to ask Gary if he was gonna fight, but I thought it'd be the pot calling the kettle black, after how I used my Metapod. I therefore maintained some level of patience. Then a strategy came to my mind.

"Go Paras!"

My little band of bug Pokemon had been working to improve poison-type moves. Paras had learned to store poison - not deadly, but enough to weaken and knock Pokemon out - in her body.

I figured out a pattern of where Abra was teleporting to. There were only 4-5 different positions of the area that he could teleport to. For example, if my Paras tried to scratch him, Abra would obviously teleport to a point that's furthest away from where Paras was. Using this kind analysis of patterns, I gave Paras secret instructions.

"HAHA! Is your lame little bug tired yet? Abra is able to teleport all day!" Gary taunted.

I doubted this, but it didn't matter anyway.

Paras kept on scuttling over to where Abra appeared and tried to scratch him, and the psychic Pokemon teleported away. Then Paras followed where Abra appeared, and then tried again. This repeated for about a minute, when finally, Paras landed a scratch attack.

"Huh?" Gary was confused. "Why didn't you teleport, Abra? What the hell!"

But Gary soon realized that Abra had been slowly intoxicated by the poisonous vapors that Paras had been releasing near the set locations that Abra teleported to and from. At first, Abra started to break out in sweat, then started coughing, then finally became paralyzed and fell asprawl on the ground, writhing in pain. Paras didn't wait for my instructions. She started scratching and poking Abra with her sharp, pointed claws, injecting her poison now directly into the veins of the poor Abra.

"You'd better take him to the Pokemon Center, or else it'll take longer to heal fully," I said.

But Gary wouldn't be Gary if he cared about the welfare of his Pokemon. He brought out his final Pokemon of the battle: Eevee.

Gary in Cerulean City (Part 2)

Gary in Cerulean City (Part 2)

The Eevees in this world are definitely more fox than anything, very akin to Vulpix. I have no idea where Gary found his, but rest assured, I was going to catch at least 3 of them.

Gary's Eevee put up the best fight, due to its natural agility, not because of the trainer giving instructions. I still wasn't going to use any of my three starters. It was only fitting that I used... my Pikachu.

"Ha! You think that little runt can take my Eevee?" Gary shouted.

Uhh… bro, I already took out your other guys in outrageous ways. Haha.

I mentioned before that my smaller-than-average-size Pikachu was a feisty little girl. When I caught her, she had put up a fight until her body could take no more and broke down panting, unable to move. Even then there was still fight left in her eyes. Of course, once I had caught her, she realized that she was safe, and didn't have to be so feral to survive in the wild. Her advanced electric power was an evolutionary necessity, given her small size. But as a member of my Pokemon family, she learned that she can relax, and sleep warmly at night without worrying about predators. All of us had each other's backs. She very quickly became a very affectionate little girl...But not in a fight. Oh, no. My Pikachu was the craziest little battery rat in a fight, the last thing any Pokemon would want to face in the wild.

With all the energy she saved up by being able to fully rest at night, my Pikachu was able to go all out and become an absolute beast during training sessions and battles. Her speed and electric power became even more advanced. She was easily my fastest Pokemon on the ground.

Gary's Eevee had no chance.

Having no ranged moves, Eevee had to resort to tackles, and even

tried to bite (despite having little jaw-strength to do any real damage) Pikachu. I was more than happy to hold back her electric moves, and face head on with physical type moves. Except that Pikachu was able to boost her speed with the electric powers around her. She was basically Flash's pet rat.

If I hadn't trained with her beforehand to agree on certain movement patterns, it would've been difficult even for me to keep up with her speed. Having worked on cornering and top speed, Pikachu was able to overcome her small size with pure speed.

One tackle to Eevee's left ribs had the little fox flying into the air, and even before she landed, Pikachu had turned 180 degrees, bouncing off of a tree, and landed a second tackle in the right side. Eevee passed out with foams at the mouth. I wouldn't be surprised if more than two ribs were broken.

Of course Gary didn't accept his defeat graciously. He muttered complaints and even said that I was the lesser trainer because he had already earned the Cascade Badge and I didn't. He also boasted about meeting the famous researcher, Bill. I nodded my head as he had to hand over a few 10000 Pokedollar bills. Who's the loser now, loser?

I didn't ask, but he didn't hesitate to tell me how he was off to Vermilion City and how he was the greatest, the best, et cetera, et cetera...

Nugget Bridge (Route 24)

So obviously I've been writing a lot recently. I appreciate the inputs.

Nugget Bridge (Route 24)

After practically one-shotting each of Gary's Pokemon with my weaker ones, I turned to the sturdy bridge colored in gold-yellow color, affectionately nicknamed Nugget Bridge. The wide area including the bridge and a bit of land beyond it is officially named… Route 24. Wow, what happened to Route 5-23, game world? Afterlife..world? Anyways.

The bridge was about 15 feet wide, and was occupied by trainers just leaning against the wooden railing. They were just waiting...creepily waiting for a weak trainer to walk by. They were all dressed in their own clothes, but I noticed that each of them had a small decorative pin with a bright red capital "R" on their clothes. Their affiliation with a certain underground criminal ring could hardly be doubted, although they seemed too young to be active members. They were probably just native youths that got recently recruited.

I knew what the game was. The one closest to me was a young kid dressed in bug-catching outfit, and was no bigger than I was. He would demand that I pay him a toll to cross the bridge, probably some ridiculously high price. Then even if he let me pass without a fight (unlikely), there was a "lass" right behind him that would ask me for another high toll, then another young punk behind her, and so forth, until I ran out of Pokemon or money, or both. Basically, they were bullies. And I don't like bullies.

They needed a (small) big brother to set them straight.

I approached the bridge and the small kid approached me.

"Hey! If you want to cross the bridge, then you gotta pay-"

"BEFORE WE GET STARTED," I shouted so loudly that all the

punks on the bridge were startled and looked at me. "DOES ANYONE WANNA GET OUT?"

For a few seconds they were all frozen, and it was important to me that I gave them a chance to turn from their evil ways. Unfortunately for them, none of them did.

The guy at the very end (the one that tries to recruit you to Team Rocket in the game) was obviously the leader of this little band of A-holes, and he was the first to react by throwing out a Pokeball in aggression. That's all the encouragement I needed to get my team out.

It was a brawl. The enemy team consisted of a Caterpie, a Weedle, 2 Rattatas, 2 Pidgeys, 2 Zubats, 2 Nidorans (one male, one female), a Mankey, and 3 Ekans (one of them slightly bigger and more menacing than the other). If I was a fool, I would've thrown all my Pokemon out and hoped for the best.

Instead, I had Bulbasaur use Metapod and Kakuna as shields again, alongside Geodude and Sandshrew, way up in the front. They were basically the shields of the Phalanx, impenetrable. Guess where we were fighting? On a bridge only 15-foot wide. I told them to stay to my left, basically covering the entire width. When the baddies told their Pokemon to try to flank my shield, I had Charmander push them back with his flame and sharp claws on the side that was seemingly "open."

Once this formation was established, it was just too easy. Guess where I told Squirtle to go. We're on a damn bridge. He went into the water and started popping up here and there, spraying the most exposed enemy Pokemon with his water gun. It was the most perfect Guerilla warfare tactic. Once they were all thoroughly wet, Pikachu went to town with thunderbolts. The bugs, 2 Rattatas, and both Nidorans fainted quite quickly.

The enemy Pidgeys and Zubats tried to fly over my Pokemon shield, but were marked one-on-one by my own Pidgey, Spearow, and Zubat. Even though my Pokemon were outnumbered by one, the more organized teamwork did more than enough to make up the difference. The final blow was when my Pokemon flew out of the

way, lining up the 4 enemy Pokemon, and Pikachu zapped them all in a single line. They all went into the water, and Squirtle rescued them later from drowning. After all, my beef was with the human A-holes, not their Pokemon just following commands.

The enemy Mankey and 3 Ekanses put up a fight. Bulbasaur adroitly placed Metapod and Kakuna in front of Mankey's punches and the snake fangs. The two cocoons were holding up perfectly as shields until I started to notice cracks in both of them, and glowing lights gleaming from these cracks.

"Bulby, throw both at the Mankey!" I shouted, as I noticed these lights growing brighter.

The Mankey took a full Metapod (remember, this is the huge one) to his face and went past his trainer, sprawling unconscious to the ground. The Kakuna actually went slightly to the right past Mankey, and took out one of the smaller Ekanses.

"Now! Their shield is gone!" said the leader of the Nugget Bridge Gang, noticing that Bulbasaur had thrown both cocoons away. He had ordered his big Ekans to counter attack.

First of all, my Bulbasaur alone would have destroyed two Ekanses without breaking a sweat. But secondly, he didn't need to.

From the cocoon of Metapod had sprung a giant, beautiful Butterfree, and from Kakuna, a mean-looking Beedrill. They had been in their cocoons long enough, using not only Harden, but a move that Brock had taught me.

"I call this move Bide," Brock had said, back when he showed my Pokemon this move. "Even though Rock-type Pokemon do this best, every type can actually learn it to some efficiency."

As inanimate cocoons of their pre-evolution forms, Butterfree and Beedrill had been absorbing and soaking up all the damage throughout this entire battle, and now that they were out, they were ready to release hell.

The smaller Ekans, despite inherent resistance to poisons, toxins,

and venom, was poisoned by Beedrill's attacks, and fled the battle entirely, out of sight.

The bigger Ekans tried to bite Butterfree, but my BIGBOI actually was able to superhero-grab the top and bottom fangs of the snake Pokemon with his massive mitten-like hands. Then he fluttered his wings and dumped a pint or two of Sleeping Powder straight into the open mouth of his opponent. Ekans fell asleep, and legend says he's still sleeping to this day.

With all the enemy Pokemon out of the way, I rounded all the punks up and had them all line up.

"You, you, you, you, you, and you," I pointed to all the smaller kids. "Take that badge off and get the hell out of here. I remember all your faces. If I see you mingling with anyone affiliated with Team Rocket ever again, I'm going to personally come and destroy you."

These young'uns are very impressionable. They probably got recruited because they believed that signing up with Team Rocket was the only way to get rich and powerful. But now that they've seen a young Team Rocket recruiter get his ass handed to him by a 10-year old, they were surely to be set on a straighter path.

With many genuine apologies, the six young trainers ran off back to Cerulean (back to mama!).

With the young Team Rocket punk, I was less than forgiving. I set his Pokemon free into the wild, breaking their Pokeballs. I took all his money and Pokemon gear (e.g. Pokeballs, Potions, etc.). Amongst his other belongings I found two sizeable Gold Nuggets so I took them as well.

When I let him go, he muttered profanities and ran away. Something along the lines of "I'll get you, kid! We'll get you some day!"

Whatever.

Crossing the rest of the short bridge, I was ready to face Route 25 towards Bill's house.

Route 25

Route 25

Before heading East towards Bill's, there were a few things I wanted to do.

The first was to catch new Pokemon in the area. On the other side of the Nugget Bridge, I walked towards the base of Mt. Moon again and found where the river curved Southward. It was in the grassy area here that I was able to catch a whole plethora of new Pokemon I hadn't seen before: Oddish, Bellsprout, Tangela, and Abra. With Charmander, it was easy to catch the Grass-type Pokemon with ease. I used my gigantic Butterfree to put the Abra to sleep before it could teleport away.

I also tried to see if I could catch some Water-type Pokemon here near the river, but as the river met Mt. Moon, it turned viciously quick into rocky rapids. There was no way I could safely go into the water, and my Squirtle was too small to carry me with him safely. There goes the second thing I wanted to do. I couldn't check out the mysterious cave until later on in my journey. Convinced anything else was a waste of my time, I turned Eastward.

The roads on Route 25 were partially paved, but you could tell that it was not often used. The grasslands and trees provided some run-ins with wild Pokemon, which explained the trainer presence here.

The first I ran into approached me with some apprehension, but seeing no Team Rocket pin on my clothes, addressed me more warmly.

"Hey! How did you get past the assholes on the Nugget Bridge?!" He asked me.

I didn't want to gloat, so I just said that they were gone when I crossed over.

"That's a relief," he replied. "A bunch of us were going to camp out

for the night, hoping to go all the way East towards the old bridge route."

He explained that there was a passage that led to the old bridge no longer in use. I assumed this is the route that you take after visiting Bill's house that takes you back to Cerulean.

"Hey, why don't you come join us?"

He led me to a group of 4 other trainers. They were gathered around a small campfire, hanging out. They were also waiting out the punks on Nugget Bridge.

"Why didn't you guys just battle your way back to Cerulean City?" I asked. "Five of you certainly could've made it past the little kids on the bridge."

"Oh, the little kids, we don't mind," one of the older dudes in hiking clothes said. "It's the older kid that we're trying not to mess with."

"He's with Team Rocket," the girl of the group explained. "It's not so much the guy himself, but all the other Rockets he will call for backup. They usually come and harass you if you don't join their gang or give them money or something like that."

The others all agreed.

"But say," a young man said. "You're definitely not a punk. Let's battle!"

With this, all five of them asked to battle with me, in a fair one-on-one style. I was happy to oblige and help them part with their money. For these battles I mainly used Bulbasaur, Squirtle, and Charmander.

"Wow, you're one tough kid," was the general consensus.

They were still happy about being able to use the Nugget Bridge on their way home that they didn't mind losing too much. I was going to need a bigger wallet with all the money I was raking in. I couldn't wait to get to the department store in Celadon City.

After parting with this group, I kept on walking along the path Eastward, running into more trainers. I avoided the guy who, by the process of elimination, I deduced, was the youngster with a Slowpoke.

The only new Pokemon that I saw was a Machop, a Pokemon that looks like a gray, lizard-human kid. It was a good idea that I used Charmander's boxing techniques to fight against him. Charmander was able to evade Machop's grasp. I shudder to imagine what might have happened if the super-strong Pokemon got a hold of Charmander.

An hour or so of brisk walking brought me in front of a large, private cottage in the woods. It was a beautiful summer cottage, complete with a lovely front garden. A postbox marked "BILL" was on the low fenceline, and I walked up to the door without hesitation.

Bill the Pokemaniac

Bill the Pokemaniac

I did my due diligence in looking for someone on the property before entering through the front door. I knew there was nothing dangerous inside. I was just being polite.

I called out many Hello's towards different directions, then raised my voice to near shouts. I waited a bit to see if there were passers-by, and no one came. The windows on both the ground and 2nd floor were curtained and showed no signs of anyone inside. There was a side path that led towards the backyard, but had a gate so I couldn't check. Eventually, I knocked on the front door.

No response. I tried the doorknob and found it unlocked.

It opened into a reception area, like in those Resident Evil mansions. I tried a door to the left that led to a large area of the building and it opened into a large lab with a high ceiling. There were some large computers by one wall with screens showing lifesigns and technical data. Bingo. Complete with capsule-looking machines, it had to be the right place.

But where was Bill?

According to the game plot and lore, Bill should be in a weird Pokemon form in this room. Nothing was in this room, except... I heard something fall behind a stack of big boxes in one corner of the room. As a precaution, I brought out Squirtle and turned the corner to find a Pokemon cowering in the corner.

It was like a freakish mix of Chansey and Machop, 4 feet high, plump, with gray skin.

"Screeech!" It cowered at the sight of me and Squirtle, covering its face with its hands. It was visibly bruised from some previous abuse it had suffered.

"Woah!" I said, putting my hands up and giving Squirtle the sign to stand down. "It's okay, buddy. We're not going to hurt you."

We backed off and the unknown Pokemon eventually looked up at us.

"We're just looking for Bill, the Pokemon researcher," I said. "I believe this is his house. Wait….YOU'RE Bill, aren't you?"

The Pokemon(?) sprung up with glee at the mention of Bill's name, screeching and yelping with excitement. Its short paws were flipping with energy.

"Wait, are you trying to point at yourself? HAHAHAHA!"

The Pokemon looked at me with some reproach, but was definitely happy to see that I had understood what the situation was. "Bill" was not able to speak words, but understood everything I said, so after a long series of yes-or-no questions, I was able to help him into the machine and help him return to his original human body.

"YOU'VE SAVED MY LIFE!" Bill, the young Pokemon Genius came out of the machine, dressed in his lab coat, and gave me a big bear hug.

"I was stuck in this body for DAYS," he explained.

He accidentally fused his body during a Pokemon DNA experiment, and was unable to input, with his chubby paws, the codes necessary to bring himself back.

"I had to eat this Pokemon food in the corner and drink - well, let's not talk about what I had to drink."

"Didn't anyone drop by?" I asked.

"One spikey-haired boy did drop by," he said. "I was outside and I got his attention. But instead of trying to understand the situation, he attacked me with his Pokemon and tried to CATCH ME."

Oh, Gary.

"So you didn't show him all your cool Pokemon research and gadgets?"

"What? No! I ran into the house and luckily I think another person came by the road so the boy didn't follow me inside the house. He eventually left. I left the door open to see if someone would come along to help and YOU CAME, MY SAVIOR!"

So Gary lied about having met Bill, too. Typical.

He summoned some of his Pokemon, naturally Chansey and Machamp, to bring out some tea and refreshments. They couldn't help him code stuff because even though Pokemon are very intelligent, it required technical human intelligence to be able to code the necessary settings to bring Bill back to human form.

For the next 2 hours we sat in his lab and he was like a kid again, showing me all the cool gadgets and research he was currently involved in.

Bill showed me the item and Pokemon storage systems (both of which he created) and how they worked. Some fascinating technology, and even though I don't understand how exactly this is possible, at least I know how to use it.

"You have a trainer ID, don't you?"

I did. It was the card that anyone could make at any of the Pokemon League Gyms or Pokemon Centers. It had your name, photo, unique ID number, etc. Kinda like your driver's license. You didn't HAVE to have it, if you're just into catching Pokemon in your local area or something, but if you were going to battle at gyms or something, you needed it.

"All licensed trainers have access to the public item and Pokemon storage systems. The things with Pokeballs is that you have to make sure you take the Pokemon out frequently, for their physical, mental, and emotional well-being."

Public Pokemon storage systems send Pokeballs to local Pokemon Centers to let the Pokemon out and roam, but obviously, these

services are expensive and do not guarantee the best attention to your Pokemon.

"Why isn't this technology used everywhere for storing everyday items?" I asked.

"Too expensive," Bill shared. "So far, we're limited to storing Pokemon and Pokemon-related items only, simply because that's where the funding comes from. It just takes far too much energy to be applied to anything else."

"Is there anything else that you can tell me about this fascinating technology?"

Bill's face showed that he was both impressed with my ability to follow this conversation, and also showed a bit of professional pride in his work.

"Come, come," he said, leading me to a super-shiny supercomputer. "This is my own private server."

It was, Bill explained, the most advanced and stable server of them all. He asked me for my trainer identification.

"There," he said, adding my ID into the computer. "You're registered as my guest now. You have free and unlimited access to my own server from any functional kiosk. In fact, if you store your Pokemon, they're welcome to stay in the open on my property here."

"Uhh…like.. In your backyard?" I asked.

"Follow me." Bill smiled devilishly.

His "backyard" was actually a huge biodome. I just couldn't see it from in front of the house because the height of the dome was covered by the front of the house, and we descended into the gigantic volume of space. It was at least one football field big, and was like a giant bird cage.

"It's more to keep wild Pokemon out," Bill explained. "I'm a Pokemon RESEARCHER, not a trainer, so trainers often send the rarer Pokemon here so they can be in the open, but still be safe. Oh, don't

worry. I segregate them by temperaments so they get along with each other well."

It was truly impressive. There was no doubt that Pokemon here would be able to behave like they would in the wild, but still be under Bill's care. There was a cave for your Rock and Ground types, an artificial river and lake, the woods, etc.

"Actually," Bill said, "I breed Eevees professionally here. I find their multi-evolutionary strands fascinating, so I've been doing this for years, and -"

Suddenly there was an OH YEAH expression on Bill's face.

"You wouldn't happen to have run into a spikey-haired boy, would you? The one that I mentioned attacked me?" He asked. "One of MY Eevees made his way outside - sometimes they go off on their own to explore - and the boy STOLE him! The Eevee was never caught in a Pokeball before, so the boy's Pokeball must have just worked, but he was MY EEVEE regardless!"

Oh Gary, what have you done?

Cerulean City Gym (Part 1)

Cerulean City Gym (Part 1)

I made a personal promise to Bill to try to track down his Eevee. He said he will report it to the Police later and that he'd also make Missing posters. Before parting, Bill also gave me his VIP ticket to S.S. Anne ("St. Anne") as another token of his gratitude. I was wondering if I even needed to board the cruise ship because I'm sure I didn't need "Cut." It was still a worthwhile stop. Besides, according to the VIP pass, it was an all-access deal with no expiry date. Bill said he got it from the cruise ship company. I guess he impressed someone high up.

"Is there anything else you need?" Bill asked. "Really, I can't thank you enough for getting me out of trouble! Name anything!"

"Oh gee, Bill, you've already given me so much and I'm grateful-"

"Nonono, I can tell, there's something! What is it?"

"Well… I AM impressed with your newest breed of Eevees. I was wondering if I could get… three?"

With that, and after exchanging numbers, we parted. I mentioned that my friend Alan's family owned the restaurant he orders from, and he promised to join us for dinner in a few days.

Getting back to Cerulean City was uneventful, and I returned to my Pokeroom. It was time to strategize about the next steps: Cerulean City Gym.

Early next morning, I brought all my Pokemon to Route 4 to train and strategize. For all my B-team, I gave them strength, endurance, and speed training regimes, and they got down to business. My little guys on the ground ran laps, and then in zig-zags, etc. My flying guys practiced evasive maneuvers and changing flying directions quickly, etc. It was like an Olympic training gym for Pokemon. With my stronger Pokemon, the ones I intended to use for the competitive

matches, I began to fine-tune the strategy for the upcoming Gym battles.

After a quick stop at the Pokemon Center to make sure all my Pokemon were in tip-top condition, I went straight to the Cerulean City Gym to register for the first preliminary coach battle.

The receptionist informed me there was an open spot at the earliest time.

"Usually trainers sign up for afternoon fights," she said.

There wasn't even a crowd for this first coach preliminary. The gym staff brought me out to the battle field, and it was basically half dirt, half water.

"There's less ground space within the boundaries for the 2nd preliminary battle, and even less so for the Gym Leader battle," the staff informed me.

The rules were 2 Pokemon from the coach, and up to 3 from me. The usual boundary regulations were in place.

The first Pokemon from the coach was a Horsea. I brought out Squirtle.

"A Squirtle, huh?" the coach said. "Some nerve you have to challenge a Cerulean City Gym coach with a water Pokemon- WHAT THE?"

Wasted words, man. Squirtle had already swam up to Horsea while the coach was going on "the talk." He grabbed the back of Horsea's neck with both his hands, and started HEADBUTTING the bejeezus out of the little guy. Having no appendages, Horsea was defenceless.

"HORSEA IS UNABLE TO BATTLE!" The referee announced over the PA.

Gritting his teeth, the coach sent out his Shellder. The problem with Shellder is… he is a Shell. He can move by using his tongue, but it's pretty slow. Always swimming to the back of Shellder's open mouth,

Squirtle didn't give him the opportunity to attack with water moves. The shell was quite sturdy, but eventually the blunt force got to the little guy.

"Come out of the water, Shellder!" the coach instructed, and Shellder, with some difficulty, came out of the water.

I immediately switched to Bulbasaur.

I figured, there will be two situations with Cerulean City gym battles. One, the opponent will be a Water-type Pokemon INSIDE the water. Two, the opponent will be a Water-type Pokemon OUTSIDE the water. I had prepared different tactics for each of these scenarios.

The Shellder was instructed to use Bubblebeam on my Bulbasaur. Bulby was pleased to receive a nice lather on his face… like a carwash. It was too easy for him to grab Shellder with vines and just start smacking him on the ground like he did with previous opposing Geodudes. It was a one-shot match.

"SHELLDER IS UNABLE TO BATTLE! THE MATCH IS OVER! THE CHALLENGER MOVES TO THE NEXT ROUND!"

We shook hands and I received the schedule for the next match-up. I had a choice between later in the afternoon, or the next day. I figured, why wait?

In the second preliminaries, there was a bit of a crowd. This coach definitely was a higher ranking trainer. The battle also took place in a slightly different configuration of field: there were only two small dirt islands, and 85% of the whole area was water.

She only used one Goldeen, but it was much, much stronger than the previous two Pokemon.

Goldeen was too fast a swimmer for Squirtle to catch in the water. Water moves also lost a bit of their power INSIDE the water. Besides, any water move that landed didn't hurt too much. It was a bit of a stalemate. Goldeen tried to tackle Squirtle with her horn, but Squirtle's shell was more than enough to defend against it.

"Don't hit the shell, Goldy!" the coach shouted. It was very wise,

because Squirtle's hard shell would have damaged Goldeen's horn and possibly would have ended the match.

There were a few more scuffles, but without any decisive clashes. And since both Pokemon were still actively engaged in the battle, it was up to the challenger, me, to take the action. If the timer went down (10 minutes) to zero, then I would automatically lose.

"Let's go, girl!" I switched my Pokemon.

Goldeen had no way to react. Pikachu launched her Thunderbolt mid-air, launching it towards Goldeen's general direction. The electric move hit the surface of the water, then amplified through the waters and...the fainted Goldeen floated up unconscious to the surface of the water.

I tried not to use Pikachu because I felt like it was TOO easy (and it was)... but I just couldn't deal the final hit to Goldeen with anything else I had.

I walked away for the Gym Leader Battle ticket that was scheduled for 3 days later.

Cerulean City Gym (Part 2)

Some interesting developments coming in the future, you can get excited about them.

Cerulean City Gym (Part 2)

Although Pikachu was able to one-shot Goldeen, I was humbled by the fact that I might've lost the match without my crazy battery rat.

It would be hilariously easy to just "counter" all the official gym battles from here on out: Rock-type vs. Electric, Fire-type vs. Grass, and so forth. At the same time, I wanted to train my Pokemon to deal with disadvantageous situations and push them to their absolute, extreme limits. I wanted to find a balance between using my knowledge and making it more challenging for myself on purpose. I was, after all, thinking long term, beyond just getting all 8 badges.

The day after prelims, I felt like I had a good plan put together. Then, with a stroke of luck, I was able to battle a trainer for his Gym Leader ticket. I had so much cash that I was able to tempt him into battling with me, and I one-shotted all of his Pokemon.

It was 4 in the afternoon that I was called from the locker room to go up to the Gym Leader battle.

The crowd had gathered in the stands and was already shouting for Misty, the 10 year old genius trainer that had become the leader of Cerulean City Gym.

As my trainer platform was being raised into position, I saw her face across the water arena. She was in the outfit we all know her in: a slightly short sporty yellow tank top, super short jean pants folded up once on the bottom, red suspenders, red and white running shoes, and of course, her bright orange hair tied up on one side by a blue elastic hair tie. It was quite a breath-taking sight, Misty in real life.

But it was time to get down to business. The arena had been

modified so that 95% of the field was a deep pool of water. There were two very thin floating platforms that were on the verge of flipping over if the Pokemon standing on it wasn't very careful about being balanced. It was a rigged fighting arena that gave a huge advantage to Water-types, and no wonder why many younger trainers had trouble beating Misty, as Alan told me.

Misty was to use up to 2 Pokemon, and me up to 3. The boundary was marked clearly (mostly the pool), and the match began.

"Go, Staryu!" Misty released her first Pokemon and Staryu immediately submerged herself into the pool. I noticed that she "swam" by spinning her five appendages towards the desired direction.

Without saying anything, I threw my Pokeball straight into the water.

"I saw the recording of you fighting my coaches, Red," Misty said. So she knew my name. "Using your Squirtle against me, a Water-type specialist, is a foolish idea."

But a second later, a fainted Staryu floated up to the surface of the pool, facing downwards.

Misty, as well as the whole crowd, grew dead silent, as my Pikachu came up to the edge of one of the floating platforms, and crawled her way up. She shook the water off from her fur and started grooming her ears (so cute!).

People would have expected that I would use Pikachu, but didn't expect me to throw my Pokeball into the water. Even Misty thought that it was Squirtle. The downside of this was that it was a one-off.

"STARYU IS UNABLE TO BATTLE!"

Misty recalled Staryu into her Pokeball, and threw out her second Pokemon: Starmie. The pastel-purple starfish Pokemon, with 10 appendages, stood with more balance than her pre-evolutionary form. Her red crystal core gleamed with a mysterious light.

Starmie was a whole other ball game. It was clear that Misty had a lot of experience battling versus Electric-type Pokemon, and had

crafted effective strategies against them. Which makes sense, given her specialty. Starmie basically didn't go into the water against Pikachu, knowing that the entire water served as an effective conductor. By standing on the other small floating platform, Starmie basically challenged Pikachu's aim.

I gave Pikachu the hand signal for Thundershock, but as she was channeling her power, she was hit in the face with a stream of water. Starmie had waited for the perfect timing, and with a super accurate stream of water that came from one of her 10 appendages, had effectively cancelled the move. It was difficult to dodge her Water gun because it could come from any of the appendages she wasn't standing on.

It was like a Western pistol duel for a while, and Pikachu was always given the first draw. Everytime I gave a secret hand signal (some were fake, as to throw the opponents off), and Pikachu tried her best to hide her channeling, she would get smacked in the face with Water gun and lose her balance. Pikachu couldn't stand still, either: if she waited too long, Starmie gave a thicker stream of water that threatened to throw Pikachu into the water. And the Water gun was doing damage to Pikachu.

It's true that Electric moves can knock out Water-type Pokemon very easily. But not every Electric Pokemon can withstand Water moves as well. For example, if Blastoise blasted a full Hydro Pump at a small Pikachu (or even a Raichu), the sheer PHYSICAL power and pressure of the water would knock them back, or even knock them out.

I could see that Pikachu was tired, just as she was when I caught her. She was panting, and her Electric power was being depleted. She just wasn't experienced enough to dodge the Water gun and use Thunderbolt in an effective combo. I mentally noted this for future training sessions.

It also suddenly became clear to me how Starmie could time her Water gun perfectly. Starmie wasn't your regular Water-type Pokemon. She was also a PSYCHIC type. There was probably a limitation, but Starmie could predict Pikachu's intentions quickly enough to negate any aggression.

Pikachu growing tired and Starmie clearly the more experienced and stronger fighter, this match was over.

"Good work, girl!" I brought Pikachu back. "Let's go, Bulby!"

Distributing his weight and naturally low center of gravity with 4 paws, Bulbasaur stood more firmly and with more balance on the platform. Starmie fired her Water gun with a super-fast thin jet, and Bulbasaur tanked it like a beast. He actually enjoyed it. Starmie tried again with a thicker, more powerful stream of water. Bulby enjoyed it more.

Bulbasaur countered with a Razor leaf move, and Starmie evaded by jumping into the pool.

Once she was in the water, Starmie was practically immune from Bulbasaur's Razor leaf or Vine attacks. She sometimes came out of the water, spinning her body rapidly, and tackling Bulbasaur from the sides, or from behind, but Bulbasaur was able to tank all this, thanks to Brock's special training.

"Let me show you all the weak points of your Pokemon that you need to defend," Brock had said. Speaks to his knowledge of Pokemon anatomy; Brock is a fine Pokemon Doctor.

So we were again at a bit of a stalemate, neither side being able to deliver the final, knock-out damage. Misty smirked at me with a "watchu gon' do now" look. It made my heart skip half a beat. She was cute.

At my signal, Bulbasaur opened his bulb slightly, and started releasing thick, saturated doses of Poison powder. The visibly dark purple powder floated up a bit, then settled on the surface. I could see Misty's confusion turn into concern, as within seconds the toxins from the poison visibly contaminated the water. Starmie was trying to avoid it, but the spread was too fast.

Stamie was forced to come back out of the water to avoid the neurotoxin in the water. The slight dulling of gleam in her red ruby core showed that Starmie had already taken in a bit of the poison in her body. I gave Bulbasaur the command to release more and more

Poison powder until the water was fully and severely contaminated. If Starmie ever returned to the water, it would mean her defeat. Now it was an even game.

Bulbasaur had concentrated on making the Poison powder as saturated and potent as possible so that he was now unable to battle. I recalled him, but not before ordering Bulby to DESTROY the very floating platform he was standing on. I recalled him into his Pokeball as he fell into the water (don't worry, he is immune to his own toxins).

I could see Misty's eyes going wide in surprise as she saw my final Pokemon come out of the Pokeball and land right in front of Starmie.

Cerulean City Gym (Part 3)

Cerulean City Gym (Part 3)

The water was now a cesspool of neurotoxin that would certainly paralyze any Pokemon that fell into it. Destroyed by Bulbasaur, one of the floating platforms was now in pieces. The only safe place within the boundaries, therefore, was the other floating platform, about 6 by 10 foot in dimensions. It was thin, and threatened to topple over if a Pokemon was to stand too far from the center.

This is why when Charmander came out of his Pokeball and landed right in front of Starmie, everyone was shocked. No one expected me to purposely pick a Fire-type. Maybe they expected me to use Butterfree, Beedrill, or any one of my flying types, to attack safely from the air. But I was NOT one to underestimate Starmie's Psychic or Water moves. To give Starmie the opportunity to engage in ranged combat was a gamble. Close quarters combat, on the other hand, Charmander had the upper hand.

One of Charmander's training sessions involved (actually I do this with all my Pokemon, but Charmander's the best at it) having my Pokemon stand in a small circle, trying to dodge all sorts of things we throw at it. I had Mankey and Geodude throw rocks at Charmander, as well as Bulbasaur's Razor leaves and Squirtle's Water gun. Charmander's boxer-like stance, his natural reflex, flexibility, and the use of his tail for balance all worked to make him an amazingly good evader of moves. It was the most perfect combination on this small platform.

Charmander immediately raised his two paws with sharp claws like a boxer, tucked in his elbows (good form!), and started jabbing at Starmie, aiming for her core. Starmie was a terrible close quarters combatant. Her body was built for swimming, coming in and out of water, and NOT standing still on a dry surface, or trying to dodge straight punches from sharp claws. She tried her best, but most of the punches were landing on the core. On the other hand, Charmander, with his wide stance and his large tail providing a

balanced triangle, was able to keep pushing Starmie towards the edge of the platform without being in danger of losing balance himself.

Starmie had no leisure to use her Psychic attacks, so she tried to aim her Water gun at Charmander's tail (smart), but Charmander punched at the relevant appendage every time, cancelling the Water gun before it posed a threat. In a moment of brilliance Starmie actually managed to do a DOUBLE Water gun move from two different appendages but because Charmander kept the distance between them so short, the water hit Chamander's body and not his tail.

Just before Starmie fell over the edge of the water, Misty withdrew her Pokemon into the Pokeball and surrendered the match.

"MISTY HAS YIELDED! THE CHALLENGER WINS!"

The crowd was still trying to process the match, but I sensed that I had won some of them over.

Misty came over to shake my hand, but she didn't look me in the eyes. I also thought she would come to the office with me to present me with the badge (like Brock had done at Pewter City), but she didn't show herself. Instead, a gym coach presented the Cascade Badge to me. The beautiful teardrop shape badge gave off different colors of blue in the light, like different hues of baby blue and turquoise, as if it was an actual drop of the cleanest of ocean's waters in solid form.

With all the paperwork completed, I went outside to meet up with Alan.

"It was incredible!" He started going on and on about the match, repeating things that I already know and have JUST seen, as if he was the comments section of a Youtube video.

I didn't mind at all.

We had a nice dinner at his restaurant again, where some locals recognized me and bought me a round of...apple juice. I'm 10 years

old, after all.

I returned to my Pokeroom to find a note that had been slid under the door.

Midnight tonight. Come alone.

There was a sketched map of Cerulean City on the back, and a certain spot beyond the Nugget Bridge was marked with a red X.

I packed light, but brought along my strongest Pokemon with me.

The night was calm and the moonlight was shining brightly through the sparse clouds. I stood in the line of trees, looking into an open space that was marked on the map.

I was waiting in silence, but someone had snuck up behind me to grab me from the back. One hand had covered my mouth, and when I turned, the other hand had a finger to her lips to signal me to be quiet.

It was Misty.

I gave hand signals to my Pokemon hiding around me, to tell them to not attack her. Does she even realize that she almost got killed?

She was wearing black all over, covering most of her skin.

"Don't worry," she said, as if she read my thoughts. "I knew they were there."

A Golduck came out from behind her. The red ruby circle on his forehead was shining with a bright light.

"What do you want?" I recalled my Pokemon ambush crew. "What's with all the secrecy?"

Misty looked into my eyes with some caution, then relinquished her suspicions.

"I heard from Brock that you're the one that got rid of the Rockets in Mt. Moon," she said.

Brock? What's he got to do with this, I thought.

"He was on his way to deal with them when he heard from one of our agents that they were already defeated."

Woah, this is some new information.

"So I've been secretly keeping my eyes on you even before you got to Cerulean. Then, I heard news from my sources that you got rid of the Rocket recruiters on Nugget Bridge the other day."

This is some 007 stuff.

"But that wasn't enough," Misty said.

"What's not enough?" I asked.

"It's not enough that you're against Team Rocket," she said.

I waited for her to go on.

"You have to be good enough to take them down. No matter what."

She clenched her fists and stared into the moon. Her eyes were tearing up.

"If you're not strong enough to do that, then you can't protect the innocent," Misty said, looking into my eyes. "Or the ones you love."

The Resistance

The Resistance

I demanded an explanation. Of everything.

"Not here," she said. "Follow me."

She led me West along the bank of the river, where the water was too rapid for me to cross before. At the edge of the water, she turned to me.

"You willing to hear what I have to say?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Then jump," she said, grabbing my arm. We jumped into the water together.

For a brief second I was afraid that the current would take us to our deaths, but I felt a strong hand grabbing my waist. I turned around to see a Poliwhirl comfortably taking Misty and me into his arms. In front of us, Misty's Golduck swam ahead of us. The speed of these Pokemon in the water was incredible. The current didn't bother them at all. On the contrary, they swam with the natural flow of the water, taking the quickest and safest route.

I took out Squirtle from his Pokeball and he swam behind us. I wanted him to learn from the more experienced Water-types.

Misty held up both of her hands, counting down. Ten. Nine. Eight… I just needed to hold my breath for a little longer…

Poliwhirl made a sharp right turn underwater and then jumped out of the water with great strength, then landed with equally impressive stealth.

We quickly and silently moved towards the cliff in front of us. There was a large cave entrance, and we carefully went in. After walking

for about 10 minutes, she led the way down to a fork that came to a dead end with a large clearing. Only one way in, one way out. No one could overhear us here. She set Golduck and Poliwhirl on sentry duty some way back the way we came.

There was a small box that she apparently left here from a previous visit. She took out a large oil lantern and turned it on. The light and warmth it gave off was comforting.

Then Misty started whispering.

"The problem isn't just the fact that Team Rocket exists," she explained. "Even though, obviously, that's a problem."

She twisted the water out of her orange hair.

"Team Rocket is always going to be Team Rocket, just going after money and power. The REAL problem is… we don't always know WHO is with Team Rocket."

"But they're always wearing the uni-" I started.

She smacked me on my arm.

"I'm not talking about low-leveled goons, stupid," she said.

Misty was kinda cute when she was being mean.

"There's three kinds of Rockets. The first are the idiots in uniforms that advertise their identity to the whole wide world. The worker ants that move stolen Pokemon and goods between their warehouses. They threaten businesses and trainers and go after small money. Sometimes they move in bigger groups under an officer. Still, these idiots are easy to handle."

She leaned in closer.

"The second type are those who work in the shadows. We don't know who they are because they don't come out. At all. I'm talking about scientists that work in Team Rocket laboratories in top secret locations. The BRAINS. We can't take them out unless we're physically able to go in and destroy their work and infrastructure.

These are the crazy people who do crazy experiments on Pokemon just to see what happens. There's at least two just in our region."

She leaned in even closer.

"The last type is the most troublesome, the biggest problem."

"The Gym Leaders..." I said.

"Yes," Misty said, looking straight into my eyes. "So you see."

It started coming back to me, the fact that the original Pokemon series had certain gym leaders and Elite Four as corrupt individuals, oftentimes in league with Team Rocket.

"Being in an official role within the Pokemon League, these Gym Leaders who secretly support or work for Team Rocket are the biggest problem."

I saw her point. It's one thing to be an independent trainer that freelanced for Team Rocket. Being a Gym Leader meant you had certain official power. Access to records and information. Power of surveillance. Training facilities to make your Pokemon stronger. If these people were corrupt, then it was hard to call them out, unless you can prove to the Police their involvement with Team Rocket with hard evidence. Even then, whether the Police were powerful enough to bring them down was another problem.

"Who?" I asked.

"First of all," Misty said, "I don't trust you fully, so I can't tell you anything. Besides, we don't know everything anyways."

"Surge and Koga at the very least," I said. "And the Viridian City Gym Leader is Giovanni, the leader of Team Rocket himself."

Misty stood up from her seat and froze, looking at me with surprise.

"What- How- HOW THE HELL DID YOU KNOW THAT?" She demanded.

"Shh," I grabbed her wrist and brought her back down. "Keep your

voice down."

She stared at me with her jaws dropped.

"I don't trust you fully yet, either, so I can't tell you," I winked at her. I was just kidding. I knew that Misty was a goody through and through.

"So Brock's our ally, who else?" I asked.

Misty let out a groan of frustration and buried her face in her hands. No doubt because I knew everything she wanted to keep secret.

I put my hand on her shoulder.

"Don't worry," I tried to calm her. "I'm in."

"In?" She asked, looking up.

"Yes, your resistance," I said. "That's why you called me out here, wasn't it? In such a secret way, too? To get me to join you in your fight against Team Rocket?"

She finally smiled. I could see her opening up to me.

Misty told me that she had her hunches but couldn't confirm who is currently working with Team Rocket. Lt. Surge and Koga were almost definitely working with Team Rocket. Others she wasn't so sure about.

As a true Pokemon Doctor, Brock was one of the earliest defenders against the shenanigans of Team Rocket. He personally scouted Misty to join the resistance.

"Brock was the one that suggested we work together to make the Mt. Moon passage between Pewter and Cerulean safer. It took months for us to set up the lights inside," Misty explained. "It's just too damn big inside to make it all safe…"

"Who else is with us?" I asked.

Bill and Prof. Oak supported the resistance by providing information

only they could gather. There were plenty of individual trainers that offered their help secretly.

"We're not sure about Erika in Celadon City. She's always been a recluse," Misty said. "Brock and I tried to reach out, but we were afraid our phones were being tapped. You can't depend on her. We DO, however, have an agent in Celadon City. GREEN, his name is. Brock and I sometimes get hand-written messages, always hand-delivered to our door. GREEN gets the latest news about Team Rocket stuff. You have to get to Celadon quickly. The latest message from him was weeks ago, and we haven't heard back since. There's apparently something big going down in Celadon, Saffron, AND Lavender, the three cities we call "The Belt" because they're laterally on the same line."

"Why can't you and Brock come with me?"

Pleasepleaseplease that would be so awesome, just like the anime-

"No," Misty crushed my dreams. "Team Rocket agents have already contacted us both, not knowing we're actively against them. They asked us to JOIN Team Rocket. They're threatening to hurt the people who live in Pewter and Cerulean. We're currently appeasing them by paying money to be left alone."

"What?!" I said. "That's outrageous!"

"Relax," she said. "At least this will keep them off our backs until we can gather enough people to stand against them with us. Brock and I need to defend our cities."

I got lost in thought. Things just got more complicated, more complicated than just being a strong trainer. This gave me a deeper purpose.

"Don't worry," she said. "I know you can help us."

I was the perfect candidate. Having turned into a Pokemon trainer a week or so ago, I was still totally under the Team Rocket radar. Even though I foiled Rocket plans on Mt. Moon and a little bit on the Nugget Bridge, they didn't really know who was responsible.

She gave me the names of resistance contacts in each city, if I ever needed local help. I could also use Bill's private server to contact Brock and Misty safely.

"For obvious purposes," Misty warned, "Keep this a secret. TRUST NO ONE."

"Is there a secret sign or password between resistance members?"

Misty explained that we once had a secret sign, but it was leaked and not used currently.

"Now that Bill's back to work - he's really thankful for that, by the way - he says he could create a server with our member information on it so he can check if people who claim they're on our side are not affiliated with Team Rocket."

"Smart," I said. "And his protection?"

"Don't worry, even Team Rocket sends him their Pokemon for research, not knowing that Bill can see through their fake identities," Misty explained. "As long as Bill provides Team Rocket his services, and we don't link him with us openly, he should be safe. So I think-"

We were interrupted by loud noises at the entrance of this small opening. Poliwhirl and Golduck were pushed back into our space by some sort of attack. They were visibly hurt by whatever had attacked them.

Misty ran towards them with concern, but her Pokemon guarded her from the attackers that now came into our sight: a Marowak, a Rhydon, an Arbok, and a Kadabra.

I was trying to see if it was Team Rocket that had found us, or some random punkass trainers that were ambushing us, but it seemed like the Pokemon were attacking us on their own.

"Damn it," Misty cried out. "They've never come this close to the entrance before."

Then I remembered all the stories of Pokemon in the Cerulean Cave being extra aggressive… this was the Unknown Dungeon!

We needed to get into this battle. The four wild (?) Pokemon were blocking our only way out.

I immediately threw out my best team: my starters, Pikachu, Geodude, and Mankey. I also had Pidgey, Butterfree, Beedrill go as high as they could to provide some air support. Misty had also brought out her Staryu and Starmie as well.

"We gotta get out of here!" She shouted at me. I nodded.

All at once my Pokemon started to attack as a group. We had the advantage in numbers. The problem was that the wild Pokemon were bigger and could soak up so much damage without being hurt. And they were aggressive. Too aggressive. Something was wrong. Wild Pokemon don't attack like this in groups of different species. It was as if they were being controlled by something else.

Marowak was adept at using her bone boomerang. She threw it at my Pokemon, hitting multiple targets. Even Bulbasaur, my tankiest, was bruised by it. He started limping in his front right paw.

Squirtle countered with Water gun, which streamed at Marowak (who evaded it easily), and then started hitting Rhydon. Rhydon seemed more annoyed than hurt. Charmander was able to use Ember, which was basically throwing small fireballs from his tail by spinning his body, which seemed to have the best effect, especially on Arbok. The problem was, the big snake wasn't being knocked out, and Charmander was becoming tired.

Rhydon was a menace just by being as big as he was. Standing 10 feet tall, he filled up the small space with his massive body. He spun his tail and we all had to jump to avoid it. Poliwhirl grabbed Misty, and I grabbed onto both Butterfree and Beedrill to get up in the air.

The rocks that Mankey and Geodude were throwing were hitting their targets and were effective because I told them to aim for the eyes, but it wasn't enough. Marowak had a thick skull, and she threw her bone boomerang to disrupt the rock throwers.

The whole situation seemed dire.

The Fight in the Cave

The Fight in the Cave

The only good thing was that the combined Psychic powers of Starmie and Golduck was enough to keep Kadabra at bay. They were all unmoving, locked in a battle in their own heads.

I have to stay calm, I thought. The opposing Pokemon are too strong but we could get out of this if I kept a cool head.

I pointed at Marowak and shouted at Misty.

"Switch targets!"

"Right," she understood my plan.

All at once I had Bulbasaur, Squirtle, Charmander, and my rock-throwing team aim their ranged attacks at their Kadabra. I had Pikachu distract Rhydon from blocking the way of this combined effort. It worked: Kadabra, with his Psychic abilities used to the limits by fighting against Stamie and Golduck, was unable to use any Telekinetic powers to block the incoming attacks. They all landed and he went sprawling.

I threw an empty Pokeball at Kadabra and it seemed to almost make contact, but… it bounced off of him as if it didn't touch his body.

Misty and I looked at each other. What the hell was that about? But there was no time to be Sherlock and Watson about it.

Starmie and Golduck being free from dealing with Kadabra, they were now able to attack Marowak with Psychic powers. It was effective against the fast-moving Pokemon that depended on speed and dexterity to fight. With her movements severely slowed, I had Mankey and Geodude go up to her and start punching her as fast and as hard as they could. They do have massive fists, you know.

And just as a test, I threw an empty Pokeball at the unconscious

Marowak, and it bounced back without any effect. Misty noticed it as well.

"Something's not right!" Misty shouted. "Whatever it is, it's probably the same thing that's making these Pokemon so hyper aggressive!"

And strong, I thought.

"I think I know what's up," I shouted over the din of the battle. "And if I'm right, we can't solve it just yet. We gotta get out of here. Two left."

She nodded. We still had Rhydon and Arbok to deal with.

"Distract him, we'll deal with that last," I shouted at Misty, pointing at Rhydon.

While Misty had her Pokemon team up to deal with Rhydon, I needed to deal with Arbok as quickly as I could.

This Arbok was quite big, and the unknown psychic force was making him very aggressive and powerful. It thrashed around with its large and powerful tail, and threatened my Pokemon with her venomous fangs.

I had Squirtle and Charmander each launch ranged attacks at his eyes. Not all of it landed, but it at least stopped him from trying to bite them back.

Bulby tried his best to hold onto Arbok's body with his vines, but there was just too much of a weight difference. Mankey and Geodude helped by holding the vines, playing tug-o-war, Squid Game style.

Once Squirtle made the large snake sufficiently wet, Pikachu delivered a powerful Thunderbolt. But instead of knocking Arbok out, the attack made him go berserk. He used all of his strength to pull Bulby towards him and sank his venomous fangs into his body and bulb.

"No!" I shouted as Arbok threw Bulby's unconscious body into the wall.

I ran over to Bulby, while Squirtle and Charmander became enraged at the abuse their oldest teammate had suffered. They both jumped on Arbok's upper body and started biting and scratching him. Their screeches reminded me of Baby Groot. Arbok was damaged, but he was able to throw Squirtle and Charmander off of him. My two little guys also went sprawling.

Then the Arbok came straight at ME with his venomous fangs. I stood in front of Bulbasaur, protecting him from this coup de grace.

Oh, no, I thought. This is how I die for the second time.

Then I felt an energy behind me as I have never felt before. I turned around to see Bulbasaur, who seemed to be on the brink of death, stand up on all fours. His body then started to physically transform in front of my very eyes. His entire body started to enlarge in a way I never imagined possible against the law of physics and physiology. The plant bulb on his body also grew, and opened up into 4 palm leaves, revealing a smaller but obviously more mature red bulb inside.

Ivysaur grabbed my waist with one of his vines and brought me out of Arbok's fangs. At the same time, he grabbed the top and bottom jaws of the large snake with other vines and brought Arbok's face close to his own growling face. It was like a scene from Aliens vs. Predators.

"Whip him into shape, Bulby! I mean, Ivy!" I shouted, as I ran towards Squirtle and Charmander.

Ivysaur was now powerful enough to handle Arbok on his own. He gave me the opportunity to take care of my other two starters.

They were weak and tired, but they were alright.

"Do you guys need to rest?" I asked, taking out my Pokeballs.

But they looked at Arbok and Rhydon over my shoulder and roared with rage.

"Watch out!" Mistry shouted at that instance.

Rhydon had gone out of control and was whipping his tail. Squirtle, Charmander, and I were about to be smashed with it. I turned my body to block the impact, and it hit me right on the shoulders. I had Squirtle and Charmander in my arms and all three of us flew into the opposite direction. It hurt like hell, like being tackled by a football player. If Squirtle and Charmander hadn't moved to take the impact with me, then my bones would've been shattered.

We were flying into the wall, and I remember thinking "this is gonna hurt more" when I also felt Squitle and Charmander transform in my arms. As his body grew, Charmander also had a transformation of his bones. They stretched out and became more rigid and stronger. A part of his skull came protruding out from the back of his head. His forearms became bigger and more defined, and the front claws grew even bigger and sharper. Overall, his body changed into a deeper, darker shade of red. And the biggest change of them all: his tail flame became significantly bigger, brighter, and hotter. World, say hello to Charmeleon.

Squirtle's change was no less. His entire body almost doubled in size, his shell along with it. His front claws also grew bigger and sharper. His body turned into a darker shade of blue. His tail grew fluffier and more voluminous, and two ears became more visibly bigger. Later I would learn from Bill that these ears make it easier for Wartortles to assess what's happening even when their heads are inside their shells.

Wartortle grabbed me and met the wall with his shell, dampening the impact and saving my spine. He had my back. LITERALLY.

Charmeleon had already bounced off of the wall and grabbed Rhydon's tail. Ivysaur, with Arbok defeated, came to join the fight. He held Rhydon's legs with his vines, making him unable to move.

"Go for the upper body!" I shouted, pointing at the general area. All of Misty's Pokemon provided powerful Water gun and blasted Rhydon in the face and torso. He came tumbling down. Charmeleon ran up to his face and started scratching him many times until Rhydon passed out from the pain.

There was no time to celebrate. I could already hear other feral

Pokemon trying to close in on our location. There would come a time when my Pokemon would be powerful enough to handle them, but it was not this day I grabbed Misty by the hand and ran out of the Cerulean Cave.

We had to get out of Mewtwo's lair.

Moving on from Cerulean City

Moving on from Cerulean City

Misty and I escaped with our Pokemon, and after withdrawing most of them safely into their Pokeballs, jumped into the water. Poliwhirl grabbed Misty and I grabbed Wartortle behind the shell. He was still too small to carry me through the water comfortably. The frenzied Pokemon under Mewtwo's influence luckily didn't follow us out of the cave. We soon returned to our rendezvous spot.

"I cannot be seen with you in public," Misty explained. "I know I'm being watched by Team Rocket agents and if you're seen with me, you'll be watched too."

She explained that I had to be careful.

"It's one thing to be a powerful trainer," Misty said. "And another thing to do that while staying under Rocket's radar. You HAVE to stay hidden."

"Okay," I agreed.

"Promise me," she said, taking my hand.

"I promise."

She gave me a hug and wished me luck before disappearing into the night. It was only an hour or so until sunrise. I made my way, feeling the damage on my body, back to the Pokemon Center. The HUMAN doctor and nurses came rushing at the sight of me, and I claimed that I fell from my bicycle in Route 4. A quick scan under a fancy machine showed that no bones were broken and there was no internal bleeding. Thank goodness. They patched me up with bandages and gave me some pain meds. After getting my Pokemon treated as well, I returned to my room and passed out.

God knows when I woke up. I found all my Pokemon out of their Pokeballs, scattered about the room. I must've still had enough

rational thought in my delirious state to let them out of their digital cages. The ones that were in battle yesterday were all wiped out, lying unconscious in different forms. Their wounds were treated, but they were fatigued. It made me laugh a bit. The smaller guys that didn't fight were sitting by the sleeping ones, taking care of them. I let everyone relax for a while.

It was dinner time when I felt like we were all okay to come out. I had dozens of missed calls from Alan and Bill. We set up a time to meet up for dinner.

"Why don't we eat up in my family's dining room? We can bring the food from the restaurant upstairs," Alan suggested, when I asked if there's some place we can speak in private.

Bill had a Magnemite scan the living for any wire-taps, just in case.

"I don't battle with my Pokemon, but I do have some handy for special tasks," he explained.

Alan looked a bit nervous as the floating Pokemon scanned his TV, his phone, etc. Once I explained everything about Team Rocket, the evil Gym Leaders, and the resistance group, he understood the precautions.

"I, uh- I'm not a very powerful trainer," Alan said. "But I'll do anything to help out, if you'll have me."

Bill and I assured him that any and all help was welcome. Bill later told me that he had already run a background check on Alan and his family ("Can't be too careful," Bill had said), and they came back clear.

"We're not just looking for a few powerful heroes," Bill said, looking at me. "The whole resistance wouldn't mean a thing if more everyday people didn't stand up to the cruel exploitation of Pokemon. Not to mention stealing and hurting people!"

We continued some discussion about what we can do from Cerulean City. Alan volunteered to serve as the communications agent. He also said he could smuggle resistance resources or

personnel to and from Team Rocket controlled areas.

"It will seem natural," he said. "I go on deliveries for the restaurant all the time. We sometimes do catering too. I can get around the city on the restaurant delivery bike, to Bill, and to Misty's mansion."

Oh yeah, Misty had a giant mansion East of the city. Her family was loaded.

"I will continue to provide the technology," Bill said. "Speaking of which, here's something for you."

He reached into his fancy metal case and pressed a button. Giving off a little bit of steam, the metal case/box opened up, revealing some shiny, silver-chrome gear. It totally gave off Iron man vibes and it blew my mind how cool it was.

"This is the latest prototype of my Pokebelt," he said, handing me something like Batman's Utility Belt. "It's programmed with Artificial Intelligence that I coded to your voice and DNA."

When the hell did he do that? What a genius.

"It can carry up to 20 Pokeballs safely, and you don't need to worry about them falling off from your store-bought belt," Bill explained. Good-bye, my crappy old belt! "Only you can unbuckle it, so even when you're unconscious, no one can take the belt or steal your Pokemon. In battles, the AI should read the situation you're in - or listen to your voice commands - and eject the appropriate Pokeball from one of these two openings."

He pointed at two small circle holes, big enough to shoot out the minimized Pokeball. One on the left, one on the right. I could definitely see how this belt will come handy during ambush situations. It also had a compartment where I could keep my Pokedex, Pokemon trainer ID, and some other smaller items. It was the ultimate anti-theft and Pokemon battle gear.

"Our conversation the other day about different technology definitely got me tinkering with new prototypes. I got more coming in the future," Bill said.

Back at his place, Bill and I had discussed a lot about Pokemon and Pokemon technology. I had mentioned some things that existed in my previous life and asked if such things were in this world (I worded it secretly of course). He seemed very interested in some things I mentioned like different applications of AI, self-driving cars, etc., and I guess he went away making some new tech. Awesome.

"Here's the second thing," Bill said, handing over what looked like a giant sports watch. The connected strap went over my wrist, and when he pressed a button, it clasped tightly but comfortably around it.

Since I am a small 10 year-old, the watch covered half my forearm. If it was any bigger, it would've been a Yu-Gi-Oh Duel Disk.

"Give me your phone for a second," Bill demanded.

He took it and connected it to the giant wristwatch.

"It IS a watch," Bill explained. "But now it's also your phone. Press this button here."

A holographic map popped up with a small dot bleeping to show my current position.

"Press this other one here."

A holographic screen of the Pokedex came up.

"Can- Can I get one of these too?!" Alan blurted out.

Bill and I turned to Alan, who had his jaws dropped in awe of this technology. We all laughed. Bill promised Alan something similar.

We talked about how we could encrypt some of this technology so we can communicate without fear of being overheard by Team Rocket or their agents. We had a nice chat over dinner about some pleasant things too, like some of our Pokemon and how cool they were.

I felt like I had enough rest before dinner that I opted to get started on my way to Vermilion during the night. It also gave me an

opportunity to find some nocturnal Pokemon. I caught a wild Meowth (sorry, she didn't speak).

I walked East out of Cerulean City, and talked down South along Route 5. Some time later I walked by a lone, giant cabin. There was a sign that said "Pokemon Day Care Center" on it. Ha! It was after operating hours so I walked past it.

The walk was eventless and I saw almost no one. I walked by a few trainers, but they were uninterested in battling, given the late hours.

At the North Gate of Saffron City, however, I noticed Team Rocket goons loitering around the area. They noticed me, and I considered fighting them, but then I remembered what Misty said. I quickly doubled back before they could come pick a fight with me.

I walked a bit to the East and found the entrance to the old Underground Path that connected Route 5 to Route 6. The infrastructure was old but still staffed by an old guard there. He nodded at me and let me through with a smile.

A long walk underground was very boring. I promised to myself that as soon as I became strong enough to deal with Team Rocket more openly, I would destroy them all.

Route 6 was actually a nice little path to walk at night on the way to Vermilion City. It had a sizable lake, lots of grass and trees. It was the middle of the night, so there weren't any trainers that wanted to battle.

It was just before sunrise when I came into Vermilion, and I was tired. I was on the way to the local Pokemon Center when I noticed a man fishing near the edge of the lake. I approached him and looked over his shoulder.

"Catch anything?" I asked.

"Not even a nibble…" he replied, not even looking back at me. "You like fishing?"

"I went with my dad one time, but… he's not with me anymore," I said, talking about my previous life.

He then let out a sigh and started packing up his gear. He then handed over his worn out fishing rod to me.

"Here, why don't you take this, kid? Maybe you'll have better luck than me. And you remember the time you went fishing with your dad?"

And that's how I got the old fishing rod. It definitely was worn out and looked like it couldn't handle much force on the other end of it. I decided to give it a few tries before I went found some accommodations.

I ended up snagging up a Magikarp. Then I realized that I was being stupid.

I took out some Pokemon food from my bag and broke it up. I tossed it into the water and noticed that some Pokemon came nearby to eat it. Then I had Pikachu deliver her most powerful Thunderbolt into the water. A few unconscious Pokemon rose to the surface and I caught them: Goldeen, Poliwag, and a Horsea. They were nice additions to my B Team. I was also thinking about how to get Magikarp to evolve.

After a quick nap in a Pokeroom, I went back up to Route 6, where trainers now came out to battle. Most trainers were easy to beat, as they were just using Pidgeys, Rattatas, and the like. One bug trainer did have a Butterfree, and I used Charmeleon to practice throwing his fireballs at a moving, flying target. Another trainer had a Raticate, much bigger and more aggressive than your average Rattata, and I had Wartortle practicing his moves as well. The same trainer had a damn Fearow, whose super long beak was formidable. Ivysaur, however, could deal with him easily with vines. This way, I tried to keep my newly evolved starters in tip-top fighting form.

As much as possible I also gave my other Pokemon the chance to battle, either vs. trainers or vs. wild Pokemon. As a result, Geodude evolved into Graveler, and Mankey into Primeape. They were my muscles. I also had a chance to get my smaller guys on fours a chance to train as a team. This included my Rattata, Pikachu, both Nidorans, and my three Eevees. Then a session with my flying team, and another with my newly expanded Water-type Pokemon. It

was a super busy day on Route 6.

The next day, I spent the morning and early afternoon doing similar kinds of training on Route 11. Here, near the treeline, I was able to catch a Drowzee. The trainers here had all sorts of Pokemon I hadn't seen in real life before, namely Growlithe, Vulpix, and Magnemite. My Pokemon got tons of good fighting experience. On the way back I responded to a public bulletin notice for a girl that was looking to trade her Farfetch'd for a Spearow (why?). I went out of my way to catch an extra Spearow and made the trade.

On the way back into the city center, I stopped by the Diglett's cave just to catch one for myself. I went to the Pokemon Center and then went to board the S.S. Anne.

S S Anne (Part 1)

Always appreciate readers and especially those who give input (even if I don't end up using them), or find little errors here and there that improve the narrative.

S. S. Anne (Part 1)

I mentioned before that I felt like I didn't need to board the S. S. Anne because I didn't feel like I needed the HM01, Cut. Still, I felt like it was such a big part of the game that I needed to check it out. There were also other reasons I needed to board the ship.

First, I had a free VIP ticket from Bill, and I could stuff myself with the nice food they supposedly served on the cruise ship. Two, there were opportunities to battle many trainers for money and experience. Third, Lt. Surge, the Vermilion City Gym Leader, was supposed to be secretly supplying Team Rocket with stolen Pokemon, and S. S. Anne was used to deliver them to Cinnabar Island.

The employee at the docks checked my ticket and then looked at me suspiciously because I had a VIP ticket.

"DO I HAVE TO STAND HERE ALL DAY? IS THIS HOW YOU TREAT YOUR VIP GUESTS?" I bellowed out.

The man started panicking and started leading the way into a room. It was a super awesome suite with a huge bathroom and enough room for most of my Pokemon.

"Haha, no problem!" Bill said, when I called him to thank him for the awesome room. "According to the schedule, the ship should stay docked until tomorrow night. I hope you get an opportunity to enjoy the buffet, and umm… maybe DON'T get lost near the engine room on floor B4."

"Gotcha. I'll be careful not to uhh… get lost there."

I really enjoyed the buffet, too. It was served outside on the bow of the ship, where they laid out tables in the open air. It was awesome.

After dinner, I went to one of the areas on the ship where the "fitness center" was. It turned out to be an area where trainers could battle each other. This totally made more sense than the game, where trainers fought INSIDE THE DAMN ROOMS. How was insurance going to cover the damage to the rooms caused by Pokemon?

It was fitting, on a cruise ship, that many trainers had Water types. Many of them also had Fire and Electric types, and I got experience battling them. My boys Rattata and Sandshrew evolved into Raticate and Sandslash, respectively. I was already thinking about my upcoming battle at the third gym.

After about two hours of battling different trainers and getting as much money as I could from them, I "got lost" on my way back to my suite and found myself on floor B4. It was below the decks where regular rooms were located, so there were no guests there. And it wasn't as brightly lit. I started sneaking around, trying to open the steel doors to see inside, or look into doors that were already ajar. Most were storage rooms for bunks for sailors, and were vacant. Once I heard a sailor walking towards me, so I hid myself in the shadows and waited until he passed by.

I finally got to the end of the stern of the ship, where the big boxes are stored. I snuck and looked around the large crates covered with dark fabric. They were hoisted on the ground and there seemed to be noises coming from inside. I wanted to unfasten one of the covers to inspect what was underneath when I heard noises of several people talking coming into the room.

There were several Team Rocket goons in their uniforms, and leading them into the room was… Lt. Surge. He had the black combat boots, the camo pants, and military tank top with his dog-tags hanging from his neck. His blonde spikey hair was hard to miss.

"Look," Surge said, gesturing towards the large crates that I was hiding behind. "I've met the quota for this month, and then some. Where the hell is my payment, and why isn't this ship leaving on

schedule?"

"I- I'm sorry, Lt. Surge. We got reports that our team from Cerulean didn't show up. Someone wiped them out. Probably the same guy that hit our team in Mt. Moon," The leader amongst the Team Rocket uniforms responded. He was very clearly afraid of Surge.

"I'm not interested in tales of your incompetence," the Lieutenant shoved a finger into the guy's chest. "Do you need me to remind you that I don't work for you people? This is a business. And if you can't keep YOUR end of the deal, then the deal's off. For good."

The Team Rocket leader seemed to imagine this predicament. I wondered what that meant for this guy. Probably being eliminated from the gang. And I'm not talking about just being fired.

"I've sent TWO teams up to Cerulean," he tried to appease Surge. "As soon as they arrive, the ship can leave. They'll bring what you've asked."

"Good," Lt. Surge said. "But this is already delaying my own operations. I need extra cash, otherwise I won't allow this nonsense to happen again in MY city."

After a few more minutes of macho words from Lt. Surge, the group left the room, leaving me in peace. It gave me an opportunity to look under the tarp. I discovered various Pokemon all in individual cages, knocked out by some drug they had been given. They were no doubt being transported to some secondary location, where Team Rocket was going to conduct their mad experiments.

In the video game, S. S. Anne didn't depart Vermilion until you "rubbed the captain's back" and he felt better. He gave you HM01 as a gift. It was clear from overhearing Lt. Surge and Team Rockets, however, that they somehow controlled the schedule of this cruise ship. I obviously needed to deal with Team Rocket and Lt. Surge, but had to see the captain first.

S S Anne (Part 2)

Busy season at work, gonna upload when I can.

S. S. Anne (Part 2)

I made my way back up to the upper floors without being detected. Once I was in the area of the ship where it wasn't suspicious for a guest to be on, I relaxed and pretended nothing had happened. I followed the signs up the floors towards the Captain's room, and ran into none other than…. Gary.

"HA!" He pointed once he saw me. "So you loser somehow got a ticket to the ship, huh? How'd you pay for it? I was able to afford the FIRST CLASS TICKET."

I showed him my VIP ticket from Bill, in its shiny gold form. Gary looked down at his own ticket, a silver one.

"Whatever," he said. "Let's battle!"

Here we go again! More free money from Gary.

"One second," I said. "Quick phone call first."

He sent out his Pidgeotto first. I had to think for a moment because I had too many options.

I also had to think about Gary's potential involvement with Team Rocket. Being a selfish and proud person he is, he probably wouldn't join Team Rocket to be someone's pawn. At the same time, it wouldn't be beneath for Gary to run some errands for Team Rocket if it meant he would somehow gain something from them. I remembered that I had to try to stay under Team Rocket's radar. Would Gary tell Team Rocket about me? Another 10 year old boy that destroys him in battle all the time…? I thought not. He would be the LAST person to tell another person about how I embarrassed him in battle.

"What are you smiling for?" he shouted. "Are we gonna battle for what?"

Pikachu one-shotted Pidgeotto with Thundershot. I needed Pikachu to power up her electric moves, given that I needed to prepare for the battle vs. Lt. Surge.

"Urgh!" With a grunt, Gary threw out his Rattata. I couldn't believe it was still just a Rattata. Come on Gary, get on that.

Then I remembered that it was Gary's first Pokemon, and I started laughing like crazy.

I brought out my Raticate, who basically bullied Gary's Rattata with all kinds of disrespect. My Raticate being bigger, stronger, and faster, Gary's Rattata just had no chance. Poor guy.

"ARGHH!" Gary started clutching at his hair and sent out his Kadabra.

I responded by sending out my own Kadabra.

"Huh? You have a Kadabra, too?!" Gary was confused.

That's right. With all the training I got on Route 6, 11, and on board the ship, my Abra had evolved. Even when Abra had been too weak and got defeated, I kept on sending him out against other trainers' Pokemon to give him fighting experience. His Psychic powers developed as a natural defence mechanism, because his lack of physical strength meant that he'd always be defeated.

The difference between Gary's Kadabra and mine was that besides similar Psychic powers, my Kadabra had been trained to exert both Psychic and physical moves simultaneously. So while Gary's Kadabra tried to use Psychic powers to subdue my Kadabra's mind, they were locked in a Psychic battle in their heads. But my Kadabra started MOVING towards Gary's Kadabra.

I saw Gary and his Kadabra's eyes go WIDE in surprise, shock, and fear, as my Kadabra went up and started PUNCHING.

The training paid off: I had Butterfree and Hypno in a Psychic

deadlock vs. Kadabra, and had Primeape go against him physically at the same time. At first, Kadabra was able to handle the Psychic attacks, but got pummeled by Primeape. But after a few more tries, he learned how to move more freely while using psychic powers. And after more training, well, Gary's Kadabra got the smack down.

"This is not FAIR!" Gary shouted. "You're CHEATING somehow! Just like how you probably STOLE the VIP pass to get on this stupid ship in the first place!"

I saw two uniformed police officers turn the corner onto where we were battling. I withdrew Kadabra and put out my hand.

"Pay up, Gary."

Gary was livid. "What do you mean, pay up? I can still beat you! I still have another fighting Pokemon left!"

And he brought out the Eevee.

"Actually," I said. "You don't. And speaking of stealing… officers, this is the stolen Eevee. I have the poster right here. You can see the clear birthmark and distinct coat of fur."

"What?!" Gary shouted in disbelief, but the police were already investigating and confirmed that the Eevee was from Bill's property.

And that's how Gary lost the battle on S. S. Anne as well as "his" Eevee.

Without any other distractions, I went to the Captain's quarters and knocked on the door.

"Come in," an old gentleman's voice said.

The captain was clad in a white uniform, clean and pressed neatly. His hat was resting on his large wooden desk, so his hair, white, neatly trimmed, was exposed. His considerable beard was also white. He was the very image of a professional sailor, full of dignity and integrity. Actually, if he wore a different outfit, he could've been Santa Claus.

"Who are you, young man?" the Captain asked.

"Hello sir," I said. "I'm a VIP guest on the ship." I showed him my ticket. "And I just wanted to make the acquaintance of the Captain of such a fantastic vessel. I also wanted to ask, just personally, if everything was okay with you."

The Captain must've thought that I was going to be one of those self-entitled jerks who shove VIP tickets in his face to demand things. Impossibly demanding things. I saw his face warm up a bit at my words.

"Ah, well," the Captain said, getting up from his chair and walking around his desk to stand in front of me. "It is very nice to meet you, young sir. I am, as you noticed, the Captain of the S. S. Anne."

We shook hands. He was like a loveable grandpa.

"I'm a bit concerned, Captain," I said, carefully. I still didn't know how much he knew about Team Rocket on his ship, or his involvement otherwise. "That I heard rumors of the ship not departing for a few more days?"

"Ah," the Captain tensed up. I saw genuine concern and fear in his eyes and I knew right away that he was not working for Team Rocket.

"Some unforeseen delays with some important equipment, I'm afraid," the Captain lied.

"Not an issue with some despicable stowaway in the storage area on floor B4, I hope? Near the engine room?" I said.

I saw the Captain stiffen up with suspicion and anxiety, not knowing how to respond.

"I'm not WITH them, Captain," I reassured him.

"You- You're not?"

"No, but I was SHOCKED to see who was working with those who were helping these stowaways," I hinted.

"Oh, yes," the Captain replied. "So you know how it would be unwise for me to go against certain people. For the safety of all my guests, and the ship. There's nothing I can say. The ship will leave when it is… ready to leave. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to leave now."

I couldn't talk him into revealing more information. It saddened me to think that the Captain had been blackmailed by Lt. Surge and Team Rocket to keep the ship running on THEIR schedule.

But later, when I returned to my suite, someone slipped a paper note under the door. It had directions to a particular storage room and its security code.

"A "shocking" special delivery, tomorrow 0600," it said. "Watch out for rats on the ship."

The reference to the word I had used with the Captain showed that the secret note was from him, and the warning showed that it was not a trap.

Next morning, at 0600, I sent Jigglypuff down a hallway where a particular storage room was located, and had her sing her song.

A minute later, I snuck up to the door and entered the code. As it opened I sent in Charmeleon to secure the room. He found two Team Rocket goons on sentry duty that were knocked out, sleeping.

There was a small desk with a metal suitcase in it. I forced it open to find a machine in it. I couldn't figure out exactly what it was: it looked like something you'd put on your pet dog or cat, but was all metal. It was mostly silver, and had a few buttons and dials on the control panel. There was an etching that said "EM12 Prototype," but beyond that I had no time to inspect it. It was something that Lt. Surge wanted, then it's something I was going to intercept. I put it in my bag and got out undetected.

I knew that S. S. Anne couldn't leave until Lt. Surge and Team Rocket closed their deal. With this machine - whatever it was - missing, I was sure that the cruise ship wouldn't be able to leave. It gave me a few days to set up a plan to screw over these losers even

more. I left S. S. Anne for now, heading back into Vermilion City.

Vermilion City Gym (Part 1)

Vermilion City Gym (Part 1)

The first thing I did was to message Bill and Alan. I set a schedule to drop off the machine with Alan, to be delivered to Bill for research. He came on the restaurant bike to meet me on Route 6. He actually gave me some take-out food, too.

"Thought it would be suspicious if I didn't actually have food, so…"

"Are you kidding? Thanks so much, I love your dad's grilled chicken."

It was good to have friends in this strange afterlife. In my previous life, my friends- My friends- Uh, wait. What were my best friends' names? I tried to recall this but it didn't come back to me. Strange. I remembered my life, the hospitals, but I couldn't recall the names and faces of some of my friends.

Dropping off the machine, I went over to Vermilion City Gym and signed up for the first of 3 coach battles.

The young junior coach used Voltorb, Magnemite, Voltorb, in that order. In their evolved forms, Charmeleon and Ivysaur were able to defeat the first two without any trouble. Charmeleon kicked up the dirt from the arena into Voltorb's direction, who blindly used an electric move into the dust. Charmeleon had already moved sideways, attacking from Voltorb's flank. In the second evolutionary form, Charmeleon had a powerful Ember attack, throwing a powerful and accurate fireball into Voltorb, and then following up with sharp claws once he closed the distance. It was a move we practiced.

I matched Ivysaur vs. Magnemite, who was floating in the air. Magnemite tried to use an electric move, but Ivysaur hid behind a small hill of dirt protruding in the arena. From behind here, Ivysaur was safe from electric moves, but could not see Magnemite. This is why hand signals exist: I used secret codes to direct Ivysaur's vines to whip the floating opponent.

"Go around it, Magnemite! Get vision of Ivysaur!" the coach shouted, but I told Ivysaur to always have the cover between him and the flying fridge magnet. The sheer physical power of the enhanced vine attacks was too much.

For the last Voltorb, I used Graveler. I just wanted to see what the electric moves would do to him, and the match was a joke. Graveler felt nothing. NOTHING. Graveler was basically able to toy with Voltorb like a ball, holding him, juggling with him, kicking, bowling, until even he got bored himself and looked back at me with a face.

"Alright, alright, just end it," I eventually said. Graveler jumped up in the air and spiked Voltorb down into the ground and the match was over.

One thing that I noticed about the Vermilion City Gym was that there weren't a lot of spectators. I think it had something to do with the unwelcoming attitude of the gym leader.

I checked my messages before the 2nd coach battle, and saw a message from Bill.

"Received package. Analyzing now."

The 2nd coach was in a sailor's uniform. He was probably one of Lt. Surge's contacts on S. S. Anne.

He had two Pikachus. They were physically bigger than mine, but their electric powers were not even half as powerful.

I wanted to talk to Bill about the machine so I finished the battle quickly with Graveler and Charmeleon.

I scheduled my last coach battle for later in the evening and went out to call Bill.

"As you suspected, it is designed to be equipped on a Pokemon," Bill explained. "It's an exoskeleton suit. The metal is rare, but not impossible to find. It's definitely expensive."

"What do you suppose it does?" I asked.

"I opened it up and found a single needle. Bright yellow. It's very pointy."

"You mean like… a sewing needle?"

"Nono," Bill said. "It's big. As long as my forearm. It not only conducts electricity efficiently, but is able to store it and amplify electric output. Testing it almost caused a black out in my lab!"

No wonder it was a special delivery for Lt. Surge. Who knows what this asshole was planning to do with an electric power magnifier.

"I'm sorry, further analysis is needed," Bill said. "One thing is for sure, though. Only a powerful Magneton or Electabuzz could output enough electrical power to kill a person or a Pokemon with a single attack. With this machine, however, a smaller electric Pokemon could theoretically do fatal damage. I'm not talking about momentary paralysis. I'm talking about cardiac arrest. Or electrical power generating enough thermal energy to cook a person alive. It's very, very dangerous. It's a very good thing that this yellow needle is extremely rare, something I haven't seen in person before. And it's an even better thing that you took it out of the wrong hands."

I thought about asking Bill to send the machine back to me so I can use it, but then had a different thought.

"Any chance you can reverse engineer the machine?"

"Perhaps," Bill said. "What's on your mind?"

So I told him my idea.

"Interesting, interesting…" He said some technical mumbo jumbo to himself and said he'll try.

The last coach battle was against a strong Pikachu, more advanced in power and strategy than those of the 2nd coach.

The Pikachu lasted a whole minute against Charmeleon, being driven into the corner and then getting cut up by sharpest claws in the city.

I got the schedule for the Gym Leader battle and was walking back into the city when I saw Lt. Surge coming quickly towards the gym. He hadn't seen me yet, so I quickly hid behind a bush. The 2nd coach, the sailor, came out of the gym and they met right in front of me. I thought I had been found, but they started speaking in whispers right there, within my earshot.

"What the hell," Lt. Surge said to his subordinate. "I told you I wanted no distractions this week. The device is missing and the damn ship is behind schedule."

He must've been talking about me. I had defeated all the coaches and therefore the Gym Leader battle was scheduled for the day after tomorrow. Even though he was freelancing for Team Rocket, Lt. Surge was still obligated to fulfill his gym duties.

"S-sorry, lieutenant," the sailor said. "It was this punk. He was good. Really, REALLY good."

"Urgh, what am I paying you incompetent fools for?!"

Surge muttered angry words and went inside.

It was a nice feeling to piss baddies off.

The next day, I brought out my entire team and went to Route 6. I found a quiet, secluded spot with trees, grass, and a shallow section of the pond. My idea was to train my best Pokemon the most, obviously, but also to train my other Pokemon to be at least above average. There were a few reasons behind this:

First, even though you can only use up to 6 Pokemon in official battles, you can use any number of Pokemon however you want in the real, dangerous world.

Second, some Pokemon had special utility value. Think about surfing, diving, flying, gathering wood, scouting, sentry duty, and countless other things that I needed in the wild.

Third, the better relationship and bond you had with Pokemon, the better the coordination between my commands and their ability to execute them. I needed all my Pokemon being able to follow my

commands to the letter.

Fourth, a lot of the trainers and wild Pokemon were really weak now, given the fact that my best team was too strong. I needed my other Pokemon to be effective sparring partners for this A-team. This was also beneficial for my weaker guys, because they were going against the best.

Lastly, I DID want to complete the Pokedex because, well, why not? And Pokemon didn't evolve without being pushed to their physical and mental limits. They simply needed to battle.

Naturally, to prove my last point, many of my Pokemon evolved: Pidgey to Pidgeotto, Nidorans into Nidorina and Nidorino, Oddish into Gloom, Bellsprout to Weepinbell, and Paras into Parasect.

Not all of them are what you'd use in a Pokemon game, sure, but they were all precious to me in this world.

"I noticed a lot of recent additions to your Pokedex," Prof. Oak messaged me. "It speaks a lot about your Pokemon knowledge and skills as a trainer. Well done!"

Of course, I had to think about the upcoming Gym Leader battle. The biggest thing was having my Pokemon try to dodge electric moves. So I Pikachu try to hit my main fighters, with or without cover. It got to a point where they were getting used to the "channeling" that was required for Pikachu to release an electric. There was always a wind-up to the attack, a timing that telegraphed the move.

Another thing we did was to have my Pokemon just try to tank electric moves, to get used to it and not panic when they DID get hit. Each Pokemon found a way to mitigate the damage. For example, by planting your feet in a particular way, or to get hit on your tail, as opposed to your head, etc.

And the last thing we worked on was to amplify Pikachu's damage by having us stand in the water, knee deep, and getting shocked in it. It got real because we were talking about potentially fatal damage. I told Pikachu to try to use 10% power, and then we worked our way

up from there. It was painful, sure, but it was worth it, for the training. It got to a point where even Wartortle could take a hit in water without being paralyzed or being knocked out.

After the training, I took my guys to the local Pokemart and I fed them a lot of protein-based Pokemon food. I wanted them to get big and strong. I couldn't wait to get to Celadon City Department Store to get the luxurious stuff. I had the money for it.

After a huge nap we went out again to Route 6 to resume our electricity resistance training. It was OHM-azing. Haha.

Vermilion City Gym (Part 2)

Vermilion City Gym (Part 2)

The Gym Leader battle was in the early afternoon. Despite the fact that Lt. Surge was known to be a dick with the locals, there was a crowd because a Gym Leader battle in Vermilion City was a less common attraction than in the two previous cities I've visited.

Victories against Gym Leaders aren't supposed to be impossible, you know. It's supposed to be challenging, of course, so that not every schmuck with a Pokemon has badges, but it's also supposed to be an attainable goal. Imagine becoming a doctor or a pilot: you want the exams to be hard enough to make sure these people are competent, but not impossible so we don't end up with no doctors and pilots, right?

In this sense, Gym Leaders are supposed to "self-nerf," so to speak, so that they're not just ridiculously overpowering young trainers. But Lt. Surge was a dick. He would tell his coaches to be less lenient so that he wouldn't have to schedule a Gym Leader battle. Many aspiring trainers would despair at Vermilion City Gym. I was planning to humiliate Surge as much as possible for this douchebaggery.

Which is exactly why I was shocked at Surge sending out a Voltorb, which was quickly defeated by Charmeleon, and then a Pikachu, which was equally dispatched by Ivysaur, and then… giving up.

"Ah, you did well, kid!" he shouted, officially yielding the battle. "You've earned the Thunder Badge!"

Even the crowd was disappointed. They wanted to see Surge's infamous Raichu, and I don't blame them. One of the spectators even booed until Surge shot a look in the general direction.

The staff did the paperwork and issued me the Thunderbadge, which was weirdly shaped like a sun. Actually, with the dark orange core and bright yellow leaves, it was like a sunflower. Could've

made it look more like a bolt of lightning, in my opinion.

I didn't mind that the Gym Leader battle was anticlimactic. I got the badge, that's all that matters. Besides, I had another thing to do before I moved on from Vermilion.

In the afternoon I got a package from Bill waiting for me, delivered to me by Alan.

"Wow, I haven't been in Vermilion City for a while," he said. "My parents even gave me errands to run. Did you know that they have a seafood market?"

Alan wished me luck and went off on his way.

The device looked similar to the one I had stolen from Team Rocket a few days ago, but I could tell that Bill had worked on it. It came with a little note of descriptions, including "Effective Radius 15 yards." Important to note.

I left all my stuff in the Pokeroom, except the most essential things. I also purchased and wore an all-black outfit of t-shirt, pants, and black hat. It was easy to board the S. S. Anne again with my VIP ticket, and then I tried to sneak in again into the storage room on floor B4. This was considerably harder than last time, because there was a visibly heightened Team Rocket security presence. Probably because someone snuck out with Surge's special package last time.

Still, I was able to stealthily go by these goons, due to my small body. I also had purchased a Jigglypuff mask that covered my face and my identity. The pink stood out against the all black that I was wearing. Blackpink was in Team Rocket's area.

In the storage room, I noticed that there were even more cages and crates than there were before. I looked under the covers and indeed, found all sorts of Pokemon captured, bound, and caged. Many of them were in their evolved states, slightly less common than your regular Rattatas, Pidgeys, and so forth. There was a Marowak, a Hypno, 2 Fearows, 3 Nidorinos, and so forth. They were clean and well maintained, a sign that they were stolen from their trainers, and not from the wild. There were all conscious, but whimpered at the

sight of me, a clear evidence of torture. I tried to explain that I was here to try to rescue them. I brought out my Clefairy to try to comfort them. She had a natural gift for bringing comfort and joy to other Pokemon, like a Chansey.

"Try to stay quiet, I'll see if there's a way to get you guys out."

Suddenly, multiple doors opened and several Team Rockets came in. There were about 10 in total and they surrounded me from all sides.

"We've got you now, punk!" one of them said.

"You stole from us, you THIEF!"

Sheesh. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

"Stand aside, he's mine!" I heard a gruff voice that bellowed the muscular form of Lt. Surge. "I'm not going to ask twice. WHERE IS MY SH-"

I didn't give him a chance. I whispered "Butterfree and Ivysaur" to my fancy watch, which gave the signal to my fancy belt that released two Pokeballs simultaneously.

Team Rocket and Lt. Surge DID react, as my two poisonous, powdery bois started releasing sleeping powder all over the small, enclosed space. They instructed their Pokemon to try to stop mine, but Butterfree and Ivysaur were agile enough to evade most of them, and tanky enough to withstand the hits that did land. But soon, one by one, the Team Rocket goons and their Pokemon began to fall asleep.

I had, of course, gone under a tarp that I had loosened, and covered my mouth and nose with a handkerchief. I also had my Gloom suck in the sleep powder particles that seeped in too close.

The air had become thick and visibility went down from the dense powder in the air. I asked Butterfree to flap them away, ventilating the room so I could move around.

But when I came out from under the tarp, Gloom pushed me out of

the way, and took a full Thunderbolt to her face.

"Gloom!" I went up to the courageous girl. She was damaged, but not knocked out.

Lt. Surge's Raichu revealed himself from behind an electric screen.

"Nice try, punk," Lt. Surge came out from behind the same screen. It was a large triangular pyramid, with a Magneton at each of the 4 corners. The electric wave had burned up the sleeping powder particles as they touched the wall of extremely high output of electricity.

My suspicions were correct. Lt. Surge held back from his gym fights, only to use his most powerful Pokemon for his own personal gains. This idea was also confirmed when an Electabuzz almost as tall as Lt. Surge himself stepped in front of him.

Without hesitation I brought out Charmeleon, Graveler, and Sandslash. At the same time, I pressed a button to turn on Bill's new device. It was wrapped around my right forearm.

Then the battle was full on. The 4 Magnetons still maintained the pyramid formation, protecting Surge, while the Raichu and Electabuzz served as the main fighting force. They were very, very strong. Raichu was able to use extremely strong ranged electric moves, while Electabuzz started charging at us, using Thunderpunch. He was able to enfuse his body with electricity and preferred to fight in melee style.

Graveler stood in front of me, dealing with Electabuzz. The electric Pokemon's abnormally large fist was visibly empowered by electricity. But when it came flying, Graveler was able to catch it in his stone hands.

"Huh?" Surge was confused.

Even though Graveler was a Rock Pokemon, Electabuzz had enough power to at least deal some damage with his Thunderpunch.

It wasn't any different with Raichu, who channeled a powerful attack and unleashed it, only to have Sandslash tank it very easily.

"Ha! You think your Rock and Ground types can stop my Electricity?!"

Surge ordered his 4 Magnetons, who changed formations. They connected themselves together to create one huge mass of electrical power, and they started feeding their electrical power into Raichu.

Raichu again charged up and unleashed an attack. And again, It hit Sandslash, who flinched a bit, but was otherwise unhurt.

"That's… that's not possible! Even if it's a Ground type!"

But it was, Surge. It was possible. The machine on my forearm was glowing with power that was being emitted from inside.

"Wait," Surge noticed it. "That's MINE! What did you do to it?!"

I gave commands to my Pokemon to attack. The Electabuzz, or even the Raichu with the 4-Magneton buff didn't pose much of a threat. Their electric moves were being sucked into Bill's machine, being absorbed by the golden needle, and then dissipated harmlessly.

"I will work on further enhancements so that you can output the electric power that the machine absorbed," Bill had told me. "But for now, the machine should simply suck up the electric power so that it poses no real threat beyond some regular battle level pain. No permanent damage, either."

In short, Raichu's powers were easily bearable, and Electabuzz was just a regular brute without his Thunderpunch. Graveler easily overpowered him.

This was the REAL boss battle vs. Surge. Considering that I was outnumbered by Team Rockets, and that Surge used multiple Pokemon instead of one at a time, I would call it fair that I used Bill's machine to aid me.

I call this an absolute win.

Last Day in Vermillion City

A/N: Hey. It's been a while. Work got a 1000% busier and I've been writing less, far less than I want to. That's life, I guess. Enjoy!

Last Day in Vermilion City

"Urgh!" Surge shouted in defeat. "I- I'll remember you, you Jigglypuff punk!" He said, pointing at my mask.

There were many things I wanted to ask Surge, like whether he was truly loyal to Team Rocket (I doubted this), or whether he was just in it for his own gains (most likely). And whether these gains were about money or for more electric power. But he ran off after retrieving his Pokemon into their Pokeballs. I doubted if he could've been turned into a force for good anyways.

With all the Rockets unconscious, I was able to unlock all the cages and let the Pokemon out. I also took all the Rockets' Pokemon and freed them as well. Given the choice, they all opted to run away from their trainers. Makes sense, since they're abused and forced to fight all the time.

I opened the hatch on the side of the ship that dropped down a short distance to the side of the dock. It was already getting dark, and the Pokemon easily hopped down and started to run off to their respective homes, or back into the wild.

I shut the hatch behind me and made my way back into the city, took off my Jigglypuff mask and changed back into my regular clothes that I stashed high up on a tree. I had Charmeleon burn the evidence while making sure no one saw me doing this.

Next morning, I checked out of the Pokeroom and headed out towards Route 11. At this point, if this was the game, I would need to get Flash and go back up near Cerulean to go through Route 9, and to through the Rock Tunnel. But since this real world was not a stupid game world, I got to go straight East towards the watery

Route 12, up North to Lavendar City.

But right outside the gates that divided Routes 11 and 12, there was a huge crowd of people who couldn't go past a giant… Snorlax. The giant, 8-foot tall Snorlax was sleeping right in the middle of the road, covering the path leading to the docks.

Could people go around by jumping into the water or go into the thick of the woods infested with bug Pokemon? Sure, but no one really WANTS to do that, do they?

"What is this?!" Someone shouted in frustration.

"I'm going to be late!" Another person shouted.

"Let's wake him up!" Someone was a Pokemon trainer and encouraged other trainers to use their Pokemon to try to awaken the Snorlax.

But despite the tackles, the scratch attacks, and even fire (someone had a Growlithe), Snorlax was undamaged, and continued to sleep and snore. It was clear none of them knew how to deal with a sleeping Snorlax. Unfortunately, I didn't have a Pokeflute either.

I hustled back into Vermilion City and went to the closest mart.

"Welcome to Pokemart," an employee greeted me. "Can I help you?"

"Oh yes," I said. "Give me five… no, TEN of your largest Pokemon food packages. The largest ones."

I got my Pokemon to help me carry the Pokemon food. Imagine this: me running in the front, and then Ivysaur with two giant Pokemon food packages held up with his vines, Charmeleon clumsily trying to hold one with his paws, Wartortle carrying one on his head, Graveler and Primeape with one each, Parasect scuttering on the floor with one on her giant mushroom back, and so forth, making a train of procession with a LOT of Pokemon food.

"Huh? What's this?!" The people still gathered in front of Snorlax were puzzled by the appearance of me and my Pokemon.

"Excuse me, please give us some space," I said.

These people needed to get out of the way. If they weren't going to contribute to the solution, they were part of the problem.

"Lay it all here, guys," I instructed my Pokemon. "Cut them open Charmeleon, Parasect."

They used their sharp claws to open the top of all the Pokemon food bags.

"Pidgeotto, start fanning gently towards his nose!"

Pidgeotto stood behind the giant stash of Pokemon food and started flapping his wings gently. The smell started carrying over to the sleeping gentle giant.

"Grrrroooooohhhrrrr?" Snorlax sniffed once or twice in his sleep, and then slowly brought his massive body upright. He looked at the pile of Pokemon food and planting his face into it, started devouring it with methodical mastication.

You know how when you see a bird, you know that with its wings and all, it's designed to fly? Or if you see a horse, it belongs on the plains, roaming free? It's kinda like looking at a Snorlax and understanding that it was somehow… DESIGNED to eat food, that all of its physiology is optimized for consumption.

"Wow, good work!" Someone shouted at me.

"Thanks, kid!" Another one said.

One by one, the crowd started to slip by Snowlax, afraid of losing this window of opportunity. There were a lot of people coming in towards Vermilion City as well.

It took all of a minute for Snorlax to devour close to 500 pounds of food. He started licking the food packaging, and was soon finished. He started sniffing around for more food. Then he got slightly annoyed that there weren't any more.

"GRRAAAAAHHH!" Snorlax started to become anxious and

frustrated about starving to death.

"Hey buddy!" I shouted at him.

"HORRRH?" He looked down at me.

"Do you want to come with me?" I held up a Pokeball at him. "I promise to give you loads and loads of food if you do!" I held up a handful of high qualify gourmet Pokemon food that I had been saving for this moment.

"WORH?!" Snorlax smiled and started to jiggle a bit. He very happily went into my Pokeball. After eating the rest of the food I had on me, of course. He went into a nice long nap.

This is how I got one of the rarest Pokemon to catch (in this world), the rarity being an account of the fact that it just costs too damn much to keep it fed. Good thing that Snorlax is an omnivore, and is oftentimes satisfied with a lot of grass and shrubbery. He is also very comfortable and warm to sleep on, which came in handy many times later on when I had to camp outside. He is definitely one of the team favorites amongst my Pokemon. A furry and lovable tank tent.

Next steps: Route 12 was definitely the way to go, given that Lavender Town was a lot closer than Fuchsia City. It also made sense for me because I wanted to double back to the other cities in the central "belt" area.

I defeated all the trainers on the way, and it was a good thing that I was making more money, because now I had a big boy to feed.

On the way, I checked in with a few fishermen and there was even a fishing shack where a bunch of Pokemon fishermen (those who specialized in catching Pokemon, not just regular fish) were hanging out. I showed some interest and one of them hooked me up (pun intended) with a nice fishing rod. She even showed me how to use it to get the best results.

"Here," the woman said. "Use these kinds of bait for the fish Pokemon, and these other ones for shellfish and others! It's all in the wrist when it comes to throwing out the line and latching on. Here,

let me show you."

With her help I was able to catch a bunch of Pokemon from the dock: Shellder, Tentacool, and Krabby. While I was fishing, my other Pokemon were, of course, instructed to train in and around the water. It had been the first time that they were introduced to a flowing body of water whose current wasn't too quick to swim in.

Reaping all the benefits that Route12 has to offer, I went into Lavender Town.

First Visit to Lavender Town (ft Gary)

A/N: I'm back!

Kinda fell into a writer's block with this part, not gonna lie.

And real-life work had been keeping me really really busy.

Hopefully I can make headway during the next few weeks.

First Visit to Lavender Town (feat. Gary)

When you think of lavender you are probably thinking of a light purple flower with a lovely fragrance, perhaps an endless field of it in Europe, and all kinds of beautiful and bright images.

Well, that's the opposite of what Lavender Town is.

The people in this town kept to themselves. All the houses had closed fences, locked doors, and drawn curtains. Restaurants were all boarded up and the only Pokeshop in town was small, its merchandise outdated because it didn't get much business. The cold mist and frequent rain seemed characteristic of the town, located in a valley surrounded by tall rocky mountains. The streets were mostly empty, and passers-by were always on the move with a purpose.

After checking into the Pokemon Center, I made my way to the infamous Pokemon Tower.

It was a gigantic building with six or seven stories, built upon a large foundation. It felt daunting to enter the building with its large high arch doors and limestone/marble floors and walls. They gave off echoes as I walked towards the security guard at the reception desk. There were no other visitors, and even though I don't believe in ghosts (except Pokemon types), the building and the atmosphere sent shivers down my back.

When asked about the history of the Tower, the security guard said

that it was erected as a resting place for Pokemon. He was polite, but I could tell he wasn't going to be overly nice to me, or any outsider that visited the tower. I thanked him and headed towards the staircase by the East wall of the building.

My footsteps echoed throughout the marble building as I made my way up to the second floor. The place was dimly lit, with rows and columns of shelves that contained jars of ashes, photos, and other small memorabilia of dead Pokemon. The numbered spots of the shelves seemed to be filled chronologically. This meant that the Pokemon enshrined here were older, and that the upper floors were unfilled.

As I found out later, not every dead Pokemon is remembered or processed this way. Most often they are processed by local Pokemon Centers. Imagine how your local (in the non-Pokemon world) processes dead pets, and it's most likely similar. But since Pokemon are able to communicate more closely and intimately with their owners than your average cat or dog, some owners choose to rest their Pokemon here.

According to the signs, the stairs that lead up to the next floor were on the opposite wall (terrible architectural design, by the way). Of course, because I knew there was something important up on the top floor, I headed that way.

About halfway across the empty floor, I came to a space where the shelves that went up all the way up to the 10-foot ceiling stopped to a clearing. And standing in the middle of this moderately sized clearing was… Gary.

With his back to me, I figured I could go down to the next column of shelves and get past him unseen (imagine going over to the next supermarket aisle). But that's no fun, right? After all, it IS another chance to destroy Gary.

"Ahem," I faked a cough and Gary turned to show his ever-smug-and-punchable face.

"Hey, it's you! What brings you here?" Gary asked. And even before I can answer: "Is your Pokemon dead?"

"What the-"

"I can at least make them faint! Let's go!" And with that he threw out a Pokeball.

WHAT DID HE JUST SAY TO ME? IS MY POKEMON DEAD? This punk needs to be put into his place yet again.

His Pidgeotto came out and was immediately at a disadvantage due to the low ceiling.

"Ivysaur, let's go!"

With a series of hand and sound signals, I instructed Ivysaur on the strategies. Having to balance a large plant on his back, and being on all fours on his very large limbs, Ivysaur's acceleration, agility, and balance were not his strong suits.

There was a real chance that Gary's Pidgeotto could actually beat him.

…

HAHA just kidding.

I let Ivysaur tank a few gust moves and flying tackles (too weak to be considered a dive or wing attack) just to test limits. Oh, Ivysaur's limits were NOT tested.

Still, it was true that compared to the melee striking speed of Charmeleon or to the agility of Pikachu, my Ivysaur needed some work. And by some afterlife buff given to Gary as a named NPC, so to speak, his Pokemon WERE stronger than the other trainers I had normally had the chance to battle. It was a good sparring and training opportunity.

Could I have one-shotted Pidgeotto with Pikachu's lightning moves? Absolutely. But this wasn't a game world where the power of my Pokemon were quantified into numbers. No, this was, as far as I was concerned, a REAL world. What if in a series of battles, my Charmeleon was unable to battle, and I had to go against a bunch of Grass types? Or what if there were a whole lot of Rock and Earth

type enemies, and my Ivysaur and Wartortle couldn't take them all on?

Sure, in official gym battles, I could walk in with fully battle-ready Pokemon in tip-top shape. But in the real world? Especially having to go against Team Rocket baddies who didn't play by the rules? It was good to make sure that my Pokemon and I were so strong and well-coordinated, that "type effectiveness" that played AGAINST me could be negligible. Imagine a Venusaur that could tank a Flamethrower move, a Blastoise that could withstand a full Thunder, or a Charizard that laughed in the face of Hydropump or Surf (protecting his tail flame, though, obviously. Let's not get carried away here). In order to achieve this level of OP-ness, I needed to test the limits and try new strategies. I wasn't just going to depend on type-countering all the time.

Back to the battle.

Knowing that speed, agility, and balance were things I could work on with Ivysaur, I instructed him to start dodging and evading Pidgeotto's moves. We used Ivysaur's strengths to do this. Since he had a lot of stamina and endurance, even evading a fraction of the moves was tiring Pidgeotto out more than it was hurting Ivysaur. Also, we found out that certain parts were less painful to take hits on than others, which is also true for the human anatomy. And finally, we realized that by spreading out his vines like the appendages of a spider, Ivysaur could actually leverage them to move more quickly out of the way, and later even learned how to launched himself with his vines.

When I decided that enough was enough, Ivysaur caught Pidgeotto with his vines, and slammed him into the ground really hard to knock him out instantly.

Next, he sent out his Kadabra.

Last time, I had embarrassed Gary so badly by responding with my own Kadabra, that this time, I opted for something else.

"Let's go, Charmeleon!"

With some success, I had been able to train my Pokemon to withstand Psychic moves, by using Kadabra, Hypno, and Butterfree as the attackers. There were two types of Psychic moves in general: one that attacks the mind and tries to hurt the opponent from the inside, or the other that tries to hurt the body externally, like telekinesis. But one thing that Gary perhaps doesn't realize is that Psychic moves are HARD for Pokemon to learn and to become effective users at.

His Kadabra first tried to get inside my Charmeleon's head, but my good boy used the strategies I taught him to resist it.

"Why isn't it working!" Gary yelled in frustration. "He's supposed to be confused or something!"

While it was impossible for Charmeleon to learn Psychic moves himself, it was possible for him to learn how to defend against them to a certain level. It just took practice and training.

Since the first type of Psychic moves didn't work, Gary told Kadabra to throw Charmeleon around with his telekinetic moves. This is much easier to defend against then the mind games. All Charmeleon had to do was lower his center of gravity, dig his paws into the tiles (sorry, maybe Gary can pay for the damages!), and then when Kadabra couldn't lift him more than half an inch off the ground, threw fire from his tail at the dull creature who couldn't move at all. The Kadabra's beard caught on fire and he started to hit himself to try to douse it. I felt so bad that I actually had to get Wartortle out to use Water gun on him to get it out.

"Urgh! Let's go Gyarados!" Gary shouted.

Wow, Gary, I'm actually impressed with that. I hadn't had the chance to get my Magikarp to evolve myself.

But… we're indoors…. Without water…. What the hell?

The Gyarados had a hard time staying upright, let alone being able to attack properly.

I had Wartortle strafe sideways, and Gyarados had to squirm a lot

just to face him.

"Slam him or something!" Gary shouted.

Gyarados started to thrash about, and thank goodness we were in the middle of a small clearing. Wartortle was able to easily dodge the clumsy beast, out of his element, water. A couple of headbutts from his blindsides was enough to knock the Gyarados out of the fight.

Gary sent out Growlithe, and I sent out one of my Eevees, since I had a chance to train with my three Eevees I got from Bill.

It shouldn't have been possible for my Eevee to defeat Growlithe, since Growlithes are basically like a bigger and stronger version of Eevees, infused with fire. But… my Eevees were properly trained with my other four-paws crew, which included the likes of Pikachu, Rattata, Nidorans, etc.

"URGH!" Gary shouted.

And finally, he was down to his last Pokemon. His go-to Ace. His final resort. His starter.

His Rattata.

I laughed very hard as Clefairy (this was her first battle) locked Rattata in a Jujitsu guard, and started slapping the daylights out of him until he fainted. It was good to let Clefairy release her stress after the trauma she went through on Mt. Moon. Thanks Gary, for the free therapy.

Wait, it was better than free.

He had to pay ME.

Entering Celadon City

Entering Celadon City

I made it up to the upper floors where a mysterious layer of thick fog started to make it hard to see. The lights were all dim and I had to walk with Charmeleon beside me just so I can see more clearly by his tail flame.

I ran into a few trainers that uttered unintelligible gibberish and used Ghastlies mostly, and the occasional Haunter. Physical type moves didn't seem to work at all, and I did best with Pikachu and Charmeleon.

The popular belief (and the canon lore, I think) is that these are Ghost types, but how does that even work? Do all dead Pokemon become Ghastlies and then evolve, or do certain Pokemon become Haunters right away?

My own theory is that they're not Ghosts, and they're more of a semi-gas Pokemon.

"That's interesting," Bill would later say about my theory. "I'm not much of a superstitious person myself, so that's more reasonable for a scientific mind as I have. Whatever the truth is, there IS scientific evidence that trainers that specialize in Ghost type Pokemon DO suffer with negative mental and emotional health issues."

This explained a lot about the temperaments of the people of Lavender Town, as well as the fact that Ghost Pokemon are NOT popular at all with trainers anywhere else in Kanto, despite being powerful against many types.

It was after the third battle vs. a Ghastly that I started to feel unwell. The fog, the atmosphere, the crazy trainers here were all getting to my head. It seemed important that I needed to reach the top floor, to get the…Pokeflute? Wait. I already cleared the Snorlax. I don't need the Pokeflute. I made the executive decision to come back the next time. I couldn't stand another minute in this creepy place.

On the way out, on the edges of the inexplicable fog, I saw a small Cubone hiding in the corner. It indeed had a Marowak skull over its head and refused to take it off. I thought about leaving it but this place didn't seem like the best location for a Cubone to grow so after a short battle with one of my Eevees, the Cubone was caught by a Pokeball.

I hightailed it outta there and returned to the Pokeroom. The next day, I headed West towards Celadon. Route 8 was gr8 m8, I r8 it 8/8.

There were a lot of trainers that were turned off by Lavender Town and were camping out here instead of staying in town. I battled many of them, who were mostly good natured and friendly. One of them that used Vulpix and Growlithe in battle told me where he found them. I took a little detour and found an area where there were a lot of Fire types. It was a good place for me to train my starters there battling the feral Pokemon there. I also snagged a Growlithe, Vulpix, and Ponyta of my own.

At the end of Route 8, the road into Saffron City was blocked by another squad of Rockets. I considered paving my way through, but decided against it. I still wanted to get stronger while I was under their radar, my face unknown to my enemies.

Again, there was an old underground passage that led to Route 7 that I took. And wow, Route 7 is crap compared to Route 8. I skipped it and entered Celadon City through the East gates.

Celadon City was easily my favorite city in the entire game when I played it in my past life. It's the only city with a gigantic department store instead of a small Pokemart, lots of houses with secrets, AND a whole lot of Rockets to put into their place. It was hard not to get excited.

My plan was to check out the Gym first. I considered checking in at the Pokemon Center, which was right by the East Gate of the city, but I saw an ad for a local hotel, near the district with the Slot Machine Game Corner and the big restaurant in which a man gave me a Coin Purse, just like in the game. I figured that I'd need a base camp from which to execute my Rocket-hunting plans, so I checked

into the hotel instead of the Pokeroom.

I asked for a room on the 3rd floor looking into the West. From the windows I could actually safely get onto the roofs of the adjacent buildings, and from there, make it onto the roof of the Game Corner building as an alternate entry/exit point. For now, it was time to check out the Gym.

Walking towards the South end of Celadon City, it was TRANSPARENT that the large building covered in glass was the gym (pun intended). It was a huge structure covered with glass, not exactly a dome, but with a flatter roof, which was glass as well. I couldn't see the lower half of it, as it was covered by a wall, but I could still see the tall trees and other plants inside the building.

Walking through the path towards the Celadon City Gym was like walking in Viridian Forest all over again. The trees were large and thick, and the shrubbery and wild flowers were various in species. There were tons of Grass type Pokemon if you ventured a bit into the paths less traveled by trainers.

The road too, was grassy, as opposed to being paved like the rest of the city, and after about a quarter mile through the green back road, I was standing in front of the Celadon City Gym.

"Why is the entrance of the gym here and not facing towards the city?" I overheard two trainers talking in front of the gym. I slowed down to listen to the conversation. I was also curious.

"They say that when Erika, the 'Nature-loving Princess,' became the Celadon City Gym leader a few years back, she insisted that the gym had as little to do with the city itself as possible. That's when the wall went up and the new route to the gym was created."

The trainers talked about how the Gym staff were also heavily involved with plant and nature-related programs, like gardening, flower-arrangements, and the preservation of the woods just South of the city.

I walked towards the entrance and there was a creepy old bald dude peering inside the gym through the glass windows.

He muttered under his breath: "Heheh! This Gym is great! It's full of women!"

I shook my head and entered the gym.

But I mean… the creepy old bald dude wasn't wrong… It WAS full of women. The three gyms I've been to thus far had a mix of male and female coaches and staff. But Celadon City gym only seemed to hire women as their employees. There was a large bulletin board that had pictures of Gym Coaches you needed to defeat in order to challenge Erika, and they were all women. Another section of the bulletin board had non-battling Gym programs I already mentioned (e.g. gardening, flower-arrangements, and landscaping programs) also had an all-women staff leading them. Curious.

In any case, I was here to do business.

The first coach sent out a Bellsprout firstl. I had wanted to test out my recently acquired Fire types, so I chose Vulpix. The Bellsprout was quite skilled in Razor Leaf, being able to launch two sharp leaves in succession. Vulpix had gotten some training in agility from my rat crew, and was able to easily dodge them. And although it wasn't quite a "Flamethrower" yet, Vulpix was able to breathe streams of flame in a small cone, setting Bellsprout on fire. It was "Very Effective," and obviously, the match was quite easy.

The next Pokemon was Weepinbell, who was sturdier than Bellsprout, but the Type weakness was too much for it to handle my Growlithe, who was stronger and more ferocious than my Vulpix.

The next two Gym Coaches were just as easy to defeat, as they mostly used Bellsprouts and Oddishes. These two matches were beginning to gather a crowd of young trainers, who were finally beginning to realize that Fire type was the way to deal with Gym Coaches at the Celadon City Gym (uhh… hello…? You're figuring this out just now?).

"Dude! How did you beat her so easily?! I signed up for rematches four times now and I still haven't beaten her!" A young trainer asked.

"It's the FIRE Pokemon isn't it? Because FIRE can set PLANTS on

fire?!" Another trainer answered his question.

They badgered me until I told them that "hey, you can set wood on fire, so I thought I'd try burning things?" Apparently that was mind-blowing.

I signed up for the next qualifying match for the morning after and came back to my hotel room because it was getting late.

"Is your room secure? Group call at 2200," Bill had sent a message on the digital hologram watch he had given me. I used a scanner to make sure there were no signs of eavesdroppers.

At 10 my hologram transmitter started to beep and I answered it. In the call there was Bill, sitting in his home office.

"How's everything going?" he asked.

We caught up a little bit when two more people joined. It was Misty and Brock.

"So, you DID decide to join us, did you?" Brock said, his arms crossed, but with a genuine smile. His arm muscles were huge. It was hard to believe he was only 15.

"Recruited, thanks to me," Misty replied. It was just like living in the anime.

They debriefed me about what was happening in Pewter, Cerulean, and the Mt. Moon regions.

"You really crumbled their plans in this area," Brock said. "Haven't seen any Rocket movement in Mt. Moon since you left."

"Same with Cerulean and also down in the Vermilion City area as well. The Lieutenant has been quiet," Misty said.

So Lt. Surge was licking his wounds. Possibly rethinking his relationship with Rocket. He seemed to be more interested in money than the overall Rocket agenda, whatever that was. I shared this idea.

"Could be," Misty said. "So maybe he won't trouble us any more."

"I wouldn't count him out just yet," Brock countered. "He is an evil man."

"I'm inclined to agree with Brock," Bill said. "Just because he's into money more than Rocket's ideals, doesn't mean he won't stand in our way. He *was* dishonorably discharged from military service for corruption and insubordination."

"Hmm," I considered. "That is to say, even if he doesn't care about Rocket's agenda, they could easily buy him out. Hire his services to do their evil deeds."

"In any case," Brock continued, "now that you're in Celadon City, we wanted to warn you about our faceless friend, Green."

Misty had mentioned Green before, a faceless and otherwise nameless ally whose primary stage in battling Team Rocket was Celadon City. Even to the resistance, very little was known about Green, except that he was skilled in hand-to-hand combat and had kept the Rockets at bay in Celadon. He was known to operate in stealth in a black suit, wearing a black motorcycle helmet with densely tinted visor of a dark green hue, hence the code name.

"The word is that Sabrina in Saffron City is either in or working with Team Rocket," Misty said. "Without Green, Celadon City would've fallen into Rocket's hands already."

"It is likely that you Green will be able to help you," Brock suggested. "Or you him."

"Why would Green need my help? What have you heard?" I asked.

"In Green's last report," Bill started, "it is mentioned that communication with our agents in Saffron City had been completely disconnected, and without their intel, it was impossible to stop Team Rocket from establishing a base of operation within Celadon City."

"The problem is," Misty said, "Green was unable to pinpoint their secret hideout."

"This is a real challenge…" Brock said to himself.

"Celadon City is HUGE," Bill said. "It has a huge commercial district - at the center of which is the department store - as well as numerous factories in the industrial district. Not to mention numerous Pokemon research centers that I used to visit as well. To try to pinpoint their SUPER SECRET BASE in such a big city would be IMPOSS-"

"They're in the Game Corner shop," I interrupted. "You can access their base by pressing a hidden button behind the poster near the back."

Brock, Misty, and Bill looked at me, their jaws dropping. Then they started talking at the same time.

Brock: "But how did you-"

Misty: "How the hell-"

Bill: "How could you possibly-"

"Look," I stopped them. "That's not important. What's important is that we have to take care of the Rockets here and we can establish communication with agents in Saffron. Sabrina will be tough to take down. If we're to expect Green to help us, we need to help him take back Celadon first."

They agreed.

"Misty and I can come down to Celadon, and we can-"

"No Brock," I said. "If you and Misty leave your respective cities, then Team Rocket will know that you're both in the resistance. It's important that your involvement with the resistance remains hidden. Besides, even if the Rockets don't figure that out, your absences alone might give them the opportunities for them to creep back into Pewter and Cerulean."

"Then we'd have to drive them out all over again," Misty said.

"What do you suggest?" Bill asked me, and both Brock and Misty

turned to hear my answer.

Without intending to do so, I had already become the leader of this group.

Celadon City Gym (Part 1)

Celadon City Gym (Part 1)

The morning after our secret meeting, I returned to the Celadon Gym for the next leg of qualifying matches.

The first coach of the day sent out a Bulbasaur to start. It had good balance between offense and defense, but was no match for my Ponyta.

"See, see!" A trainer in the audience shouted. "He's using Fire types again, no wonder it's so easy!"

"He's not skilled at all," another trainer said, his arms crossed. "It's just that the Grass Pokemon are weak vs. Fire."

And yet, until I came along, these NPCs hadn't figured that out…

"Let's go Ivysaur!" The coach sent out her second and last Pokemon. "Are you going to continue using Ponyta? Or some other Fire Pokemon?"

It was clear that she had heard what the audience was saying, and was also thinking that I was taking the easy way out by using Fire Pokemon. But I mean… I'm not the one that made a damn Grass-Type Gym without putting restrictions on the types of Pokemon the challengers can use, haha. But if it was a test of skill they want to see, then…

"Ponyta, good work!" I recalled her into her Pokeball. "Let's go!"

Wartortle and I didn't give the coach to respond. Wartortle's water moves weren't going to be as effective, especially when it was against an advanced evolution form like Ivysaur. But physical type moves are effective regardless. Ivysaur tried its best to back up and lash out at the charging Wartortle with his vines, but having practiced sparring with my super-fast Charmeleon, Wartortle was used to speeds much faster than what Ivysaur could deliver.

Once Wartortle got within melee distance of Ivysaur, there was very little the plant dino could do. After slashing at Ivysaur's eyes, Wartortle feigned and then evaded the retaliatory vine whips. Moving to Ivysaur's flank, he attacked with headbutts to the temple. I had learned that Ivysaurs are unable to rotate quickly, and so attacks from the blindsides on the flanks are devastating. The coach's Ivysaur was knocked out in a matter of seconds.

Everyone was struck with silence and amazement, and even the gym coach came to shake my hand after the battle.

The next gym coach used one Pokemon only: Exeggcute.

"Do you think he can beat her as well?" I overheard a trainer in the stands.

"I don't know, he's pretty good, but she's also undefeated in the last 20 matches."

I knew that if I were to defeat this gym coach, I would be able to sign up for the other qualifying rounds after lunch. I wanted to end the fight as soon as possible, so that I could have some time to strategize and rest my fighters.

I used my Kadabra to neutralize the Psychic attacks from Exeggcute. Kadabra's Psychic power levels were much higher than that of his opponent. It must've seemed odd to the audience when the two Pokemon were standing still in the battle arena, both seemingly staring into each other's eyes. But in fact, they were waging a battle in their minds. I had trained with Kadabra, so he could show me what it looked like in my mind as well. The gym coach, being an expert only in Grass type Pokemon and not Psychic types, did not know that you could bolster Psychic moves by telepathically linking with your Pokemon. This was also the reason why I knew I needed to train hard before going up against Sabrina. She was definitely going to be a tough opponent.

In any case, after standing still for about a minute, Kadabra had knocked out Exeggcute from inside his (their?) minds. Kadabra disconnected from the Psychic link and turned towards me, as if he was asking "Okay, I did the thing. What now?" But even to the judge

it wasn't clear that Exeggcute was knocked out, because it still seemed like he was frozen…

"Uhh… What's going on?" the audience started to ask, and finally the judge had to ask the gym Chansey to check Exeggcute's condition.

"EXEGGCUTE IS UNABLE TO BATTLE! THE CHALLENGER WINS!"

Everyone in the audience must've been disappointed by what they considered to be an anticlimactic end to the battle, but there soon was something they could get excited about.

"Oh my god," one of them pointed towards a set of doors. "Is that who I think it is?!"

A beautiful young woman was standing by the double doors that led into some restricted back areas of the gym. On either side of her were the highest ranking gym coaches, protecting her from the crowds that had rushed to get a closer glimpse at the Celadon City Leader: Erika.

Her flawless silk kimono carried the color of flora: a luscious green on top, and a warm, dark red dress with beautiful gilded finishing at the bottom. The ribbons in the back and the headband that adorned her head were patterned with flowers. Her jet black hair came down to just below her chin, and you could bet a million bucks that it smelled like flowers.

She must've quietly come through the doors during the last battle, and according to some of the fanboys in the stands, it was an absolute treat and a rare occurence to see Erika like this. She was a recluse, I remember Misty telling me. Everything about Erika seemed traditional, old-fashioned, and docile.

With a small smile aimed at no one in particular, Erika started to turn towards the doors she had walked through. Just then, I thought that she had looked directly at me, and that our eyes had locked on each other for a brief second. Then, as if it were a faint floral scene in the zephyr, that connection was gone. Perhaps I had imagined it all.

I had become even more popular with the trainers at the gym after the morning matches, and many of them surrounded me, asking me about where I got my Fire Pokemon.

"I'm not giving out free tips," I said. "This ain't a charity fund. If you want the deets, show me the GREENS."

They reluctantly handed over some large bills, and, fair is fair, I did tell them exactly where I got my Fire Pokemon on Route 8.

"COME ON GUYS," one of them said to the rest of the group. "IF WE GO NOW, MAYBE WE CAN CATCH THEM BEFORE DINNER."

And as they were heading out, one of them gave me a voucher for a free Flower Arrangement session.

"After my tenth defeat, one of the Gym Coaches gave it to me," he said. "I guess she felt really bad for me. But I'm not gonna go to a stupid Flower Arrangement thing. That's for GIRLS."

I ignored this sexist comment, but took the voucher anyway. I had spent my past life mostly in bed and in hospitals. I was determined to experience life to the fullest in this weird world, my Pokemon afterlife.

The first gym coach in the afternoon was quite easy to deal with, as she used an Oddish and then a Gloom. I had Ivysaur go up against them, to test his strength without any type advantage. Just the sheer power difference of Razor Leaf and Vine Whips destroyed the opponent's Pokemon easily.

The second gym coach in the afternoon was my last qualifying match before being able to challenge Erika herself. This coach was tough because she used three decent Grass Pokemon in their second evolutionary forms: Weepinbell, Gloom, and Ivysaur. The coach put up an amazing fight, mixing Grass type moves as well as Poison type moves.

I used Wartortle against Weepinbell to do a limit test in the face of a type disadvantage. I had him use Water Gun directly into

Weepinbell's mouth. It didn't hurt it at all.

The coach had a "how did this idiot get through the previous rounds" expression on her face until Wartortle didn't stop filling up Weepinbell with more water than it could handle. Weepinbell tried to hold its ground as best as it could, but the endlessly flowing water started blowing it up like a balloon, until it could hold no more. It flew across the battle arena with the excess water acting like jet fuel. It hit the ceiling and was knocked out.

Gloom had the bad luck of facing my Charmeleon. It tried to keep its distance and use Poison type moves. It was a great strategy, but the coach did not know that all my Pokemon had its turn against my own Poison Pokemon (i.e. Butterfree, Gloom, Beedrill, etc.), establishing an immunity against most levels of poison and toxins. It is not a stretch to say that all Charmeleon had to do was walk up to the Gloom and punch it once or twice until it was unable to fight.

The coach sent out the last Pokemon: Ivysaur. I sent out my own to create a mirror match. But the level gap was not even close. My Ivy tanked everything the opponent Ivysaur threw at him, and then simply repaid with greater force and skill. In the end, the other Ivysaur actually got poisoned, which surprised everyone, including me, given the high toxin tolerance levels of the Bulbasaur evolutions. In any case, the qualifying matches were done with, and I could officially challenge Erika.

"The earliest possible time is the day after tomorrow," the receptionist informed me.

I took the appointment slip and went back into the city center. Since I had the whole day tomorrow to strategize, I figured the evening today was as good a time as any to scope out the Game Corner.

It was gambling…technically.

You purchased some "coins" which were used in the slot machines, and the coins could be exchanged for goods in a completely different building. Since you were not using money to get more money, it was considered legal. And if it wasn't illegal, it was okay for a 10 year old to participate.

Even into dinner time there were plenty of people sitting at the coin machines. I tried sitting next to some adults and they looked at me funny. Two of them even gave me some coins to get them to sit away from them. "Not good for luck," they said. Hey, I'm happy to oblige for a few coins.

I knew that these machines were all rigged to various degrees, and those that are programmed to not win will never win. I saw an older lady win a few decent coin counts, and when she stood up to leave, I took her seat. It also gave me a good vantage point to the back counter…and the secret button behind the poster.

Once in a while a shady looking guy or two would reach behind the poster, and then disappear around the cabinet, out of sight. Even though they weren't wearing the Team Rocket uniforms, it was clear who they were.

"Ding ding ding ding ding!" my machine started ringing with small dinging noises.

I was so distracted by the shady fellas that I hadn't even noticed that I had hit a medium jackpot. It wasn't until the overflowing coins started hitting the ground that I realized what had happened.

Hmm… I already had about half the coins I needed for a Dratini.

Celadon City Gym (Part 2)

Celadon City Gym (Part 2)

Very early the next morning, I went out to the quiet Route 7 area to train and strategize against the upcoming battle vs. Erika. It was clear that she'd use Grass type Pokemon, so I focussed on that. I had confidence that I'd best her in a gym battle.

I had brunch at the restaurant downtown and went to the Celadon City Gym. I figured that after the gym battle tomorrow, I wouldn't go out of my way to attend the flower arrangement class, so might as well do it this morning to relax a bit.

"Good morning," the receptionist greeted me. She recognized me. "Oh, your battle is actually scheduled for tomorrow morning."

"Hi, yes, I know. I was just wondering if I could use this?"

I handed her the voucher for a free introductory flower arrangement class.

"Oh, this is…!" The receptionist seemed perplexed. "I mean yes, this IS a legitimate voucher we have issued, but we currently don't have the usual instructor to lead this… Hold on. I will check for you."

She picked up the phone, evidently to call someone higher up.

"We're going to see if there's anything we can do for you," the receptionist said, hanging up the phone. She showed me to a comfy chair while I waited.

After about five minutes, I heard the doors from the inner offices of the gym open behind the receptionist. The receptionist turned around to look who walked through, looked back at her desk, then did a quick double take, standing up.

"Miss Erika!" she gave a surprise gasp. "I was told that we didn't have any suitable instructors this morning."

"Yes," Erika answered with a smile on her face. "I am very sorry for the inconvenience." She said to the receptionist, then turned towards me. I'm glad that the reception area was completely empty except for us, otherwise I would've had to deal with the obnoxious Erika fanboys.

She had a different colored kimono than I had seen her in yesterday, but it still had hues of green and deep red as the main colors. She had her hands folded in front of her and addressed me with a genuine smile and politeness.

"Our flower arrangement expert was unfortunately called away with a family emergency. We are very sorry to have caused you inconvenience," Erika explained, bowing in apology. I started waving my hands in front of me to show that it was okay, but she went on. "Even though it has been a while since I have led this program myself, it would be unbecoming of Celadon City Gym if it were to turn away a guest who has honored us with his visit. If it is acceptable with you, would you let me facilitate this morning's flower arrangement session myself?"

WOULD I?!

Before I knew what was happening, Erika herself was leading me into a small classroom with velvet-covered low tables laid out for a follow-along flower arrangement class. An assistant placed a flat vase for me, and then one for Erika, and then brought in a small selection of flowers, branches, and plants, laying them out gently. She pressed a button on the wall that caused the windows of the room to tint out and dim the room. Then she left, leaving me and Erika alone in the room.

"I would like to give you a short introduction to the art and tradition of flower arrangement. As I describe the few main features, I will show you by providing you an example here in front of me," Erika said.

"The tradition that we keep at Celadon City Gym follows a few distinct rules. First, because the flower arrangement will be placed in a space that is covered by three sides, we must focus on how the piece will look from the front side."

As Erika said this, she motioned with her hand to show me a space by the wall where a space has been prepared so that the floor is slightly raised from the rest of the room and there was a space covered on three sides.

"Second, we value the lines created by the arrangement of longer branches and flower stems, and the space between them, as opposed to trying to fill an entire basket with blooming flowers."

As an example, she meticulously measured out a branch (1.5 to 2 times the length of the flat vase length) and started placing the branches into a spiked hold at the bottom of the vase. There were so many rules to follow.

"And lastly, we value asymmetry created by the placement of these elements, and often use flowers that are not in full bloom when we place them."

Erika presented her creation, and I admired it. Then she encouraged me to create one of my own.

I picked up a branch and recalled all the little rules that Erika showed. The first branch must be such and such a length, placed here in such a way… The second branch must be 3 quarters the length of the first, etc… It just wasn't speaking to me. All these… rules.

"I think… that your arrangement was beautiful, Erika," I said. "It's traditional and wonderful. But…"

"But…?"

"It feels… trapped," I said, looking at the arrangement, surrounded on three sides. I grabbed a branch, much like the first one Erika used, but I clipped it differently.

"You said that it is important for the arrangement to have a good front side, as that is what will be visible to those in the room," I said. "But in nature, that's not what happens. In nature, plants don't get to decide where to be seen from. They just… *are* , and that's what makes them beautiful."

"..." Erika listened to me in silence.

"You said lines, space, and asymmetry were the next important things," I said, grabbing another branch. "And I absolutely see what makes yours beautiful, but again…" I placed my branch in a slightly different pattern than hers. "I think it's also okay to take a step away from tradition, given that you respect it."

I saw her eyes looking at my arrangement carefully.

"And finally," I said, grabbing the flower piece, one that was blooming more than the one Erika chose. "I think it's okay to express yourself more naturally, and let yourself go more." I had finished my piece, and slowly rotated my vase so we could see it from all angles.

"Haha," I laughed a little bit. "Definitely not as beautiful as yours, Erika. But maybe it will look better in the light, not stuck in the corner there."

I walked over to the wall and pressed a button. The windows cleared up and the sunlight flooded the room, hitting my flower arrangement. It seemed fuller, more natural.

Erika smiled politely. She walked over to my piece and reached her hand out, about to touch it, but retracted her hand. It seemed like she was deep in thought.

"You came to us this morning to learn a little bit about flower arrangement," she finally said, turning towards me with a warm smile. "But it seems I was the one that was destined to learn something valuable from you. Thank you."

She gave me a little bow. I bowed back.

She brewed me a cup of green tea all by herself, and we talked a little bit about her love for plants and flowers before she was called away on other important gym matters.

I felt refreshed on a spiritual level, ready to continue with my afternoon training. Tomorrow morning, after all, I would meet her as my opponent.

Celadon City Gym (Part 3)

Celadon City Gym (Part 3)

The morning air was cold and crisp. I checked my gear and headed towards the Celadon City Gym for my leader battle.

At the entrance, there was already a crowd that gathered to see the match. I want to say that it was me they were here for, but let's be serious. Everyone is here to see Erika.

"Please stand here," the gym staff led to a platform beneath the battle arena, and reminded me of the rules. General stuff, and then she said that Erika will use three Pokemon.

As the platform went up, I heard the crowd cheering, but that's because Erika's platform was also being raised from the other end of the arena. She was still wearing a kimono, but… it seemed slightly different. A more modern color and design than those she was wearing before.

"THIS IS AN OFFICIAL CELADON CITY GYM BATTLE BETWEEN GYM LEADER ERIKA AND THE CHALLENGER! TRAINERS READY? BATTLE!"

I saw Erika do a slight bow with her head, then send out her first Pokemon.

"Let's go, Victreebel!"

The battle arena was covered with grass and plants. There were also four large trees in the middle of each quadrant that battling Pokemon could use as cover. Erika's Victreebel immediately bound itself to two trees on Erika's side using its massive, lengthy vines. From there, and on this particular battlefield, it was clear that it had a home advantage.

I sent out my Wartortle. As we had previously strategized, he started to use Water Gun, aiming for Victreebel's open mouth at the top.

"Oh, it's the same strategy as before!" someone from the stands recognized my previous fight vs. Weepinbell.

But Erika was smarter than the coaches.

"Cover up!" she instructed.

Victreebel immediately put the large leaf over her head, which was an effective shield against Water Gun. Victreebel got plenty wet, but was otherwise unhurt.

"Counter with Razor Leaf!"

Victreebel kept her mouth covered, and her grasp on the two trees strong, while throwing out HUGE Razor Leaves from from her sides. Wartortle stopped attacking, extracted his head and limbs into the safety of his shell, and turned it towards the incoming projectiles. They connected with his shell, sending him flying towards me.

I caught him with his Pokeball beam, returning him into the safety of his Pokeball. I sent out Pikachu simultaneously, whose quick movement into the field was caught too late by Victreebel and Erika.

"Let go of the trees! Brush off the water!" Erika shouted urgently.

Although Victreebel probably wasn't sure why Erika gave those commands, she was absolutely obedient. Unfortunately, it was too late. The water may not have damaged Victreebel, but it was still an excellent conductor of electricity. It wouldn't even have taken a full power Thundershock to do the job, but I told Pikachu to go all out, just in case.

Victreebel, who was easily dozens of times bigger and taller than Pikachu, went limp and unconscious.

"VICTREEBEL IS UNABLE TO BATTLE!"

With the announcer's voice ringing out, Erika sent out her second Pokemon, Tangela.

"Defensive maneuvers and then use Vine Whip!" Erika gave her commands.

Tangela was not a fast Pokemon at all, so Pikachu was able to get in a lot of Thundershock in, causing damage. But because Tangela hadn't been soaked by water, it was able to stay conscious. After a bit, Tangela came up with a new strategy: it created a shield of sorts with her vines to tank the electric damage. With her amazing ability to almost instantly produce an interminable amount of vines around its body, it was able to do this with some success. It was time to switch it up.

I guess the audience expected me to use Fire Pokemon, so when they saw my Kadabra, they were surprised. Even Erika seemed to not know what to do at first, but then she gave her orders.

"Get close now! Wrap him up!" She yelled, and Tangela started running at Kadabra at full speed, launching her vines at Kadabra.

Feeling the psychic connection with Kadabra, I reached out with my left hand and Kadabra did the same. It was like using the Force through Kadabra. He had stopped not only the vines from reaching his body, but had lifted Tangela from the ground, making her little feet dangle in the air.

Try as she might, Tangela could never break from something so powerful as telekinesis. I turned my hand palm up, and started to bring my fingers inwards, instructing Kadabra to squeeze the space around Tangela using his psychic powers. Tangela started screeching in pain.

Easy, Kadabra, I told him in my mind. We just want a submission, not to kill her. Kadabra slowed down a little bit, and Erika asked the judge to stop the fight for Tangela.

"TANGELA IS UNABLE TO BATTLE! ERIKA NOW HAS ONE POKEMON LEFT!"

Vileplume came out of her Pokeball and everyone gasped at the sheer size of her Rafflesia-like flower. It was a rare treat for everyone to see Erika being challenged in the first place, and an even greater, rarer treat to get to see her use her most powerful Pokemon, Vileplume.

It was not arrogance that made me not to use Charmeleon or any of my other Fire types vs. Vileplume. It was more of an homage to Erika, in her own gym, on this Grass battle arena, that I used none other than my Ivysaur.

"Jump!" Erika shouted at Vileplume, and I was surprised.

Ivysaur had come out of his Pokeball and had immediately tried to swipe Vileplume with his vines from left to right. Vileplume was able to jump in time because of Erika's early warning.

The first surprise attack being unsuccessful, Ivysaur closed in the distance between his opponent. He feigned an attack with his whip, then tackled Vileplume when she evaded it.

"Poison Powder!" Erika shouted, and Vileplume did a spinning jump (like a ballerina), releasing poisonous pollen from her giant flower.

Ivysaur facetanked it. It was like drugs to him.

"Sleep Powder!" Erika shouted again, and as Vileplume was purging a different set of spores, I gave Ivysaur the next commands.

Ivysaur stood his ground and as the Sleep Powder fell on him, he closed his eyes.

"Petal Blizzard!" Erika gave her command, and Vileplume's petals began to glow with a bright light, then energy projectiles started to rain towards Ivysaur.

Hmm. Cool. Gotta figure out how to teach that to my Pokemon later.

Ivysaur tanked everything, and as the last of the petals hit him, he opened his eyes.

"Huh? Ivysaur wasn't asleep?!" one of the trainers said.

No, he was not. And as Vileplume had just spent all her energy channeling that big move, Ivysaur was ready to pay in kind.

His entire body seemed to harden as he charged, full-speed into the defenseless Vileplume. The little plant had some amazing special

moves, but wasn't built for physical punishment.

"VILEPLUME IS UNABLE TO BATTLE! THE CHALLENGER WINS!"

Erika walked up to the unconscious Vileplume to see if she was okay. I walked up to her.

"Is she okay?" I asked.

"Yes," Erika said. "She will be fine."

An assistant came and took Vileplume to be treated, and Erika presented the Rainbow Badge to me in front of everyone.

She then thanked me in a lower voice.

"For what?"

"I've seen your battles with your Charmeleon," Erika said. "You could have easily defeated my Pokemon with him alone. Yet, you didn't. There could be many reasons why, but I'd like to think it is because you did not want to hurt my Pokemon."

Instead of giving an answer, I simply smiled, and extended a hand.

"It was a good match," I said.

Erika smiled and shook my hand.

With this business concluded, it was time to kick Rocket ass.

Game Corner (Part 1)

A/N: Hope you're enjoying

Game Corner (Part 1)

With only a short visit to the Pokemon Center to make sure my fighting force was ready, I wasted no time. I wore my black clothing under my regular clothes and put the Jigglypuff mask in my pocket.

Sitting at one of the slot machines, I waited a bit to make sure no one was watching before I crept up towards the poster. Everyone was too distracted by their own machines to even notice. Acting as naturally as I could, I pressed the secret button, which released a lock on the wall beside it. I pushed open the secret door and walked down the stairs.

I went into stealth mode and sent out my Pikachu for recon (she was the smallest).

There indeed WERE Rocket guys. Down here, away from the eyes of the public, they were dressed freely in their ugly Team Rocket uniforms. There were some computers, file cabinets, and crates containing who-knows-what required for their evil deeds. It was not hard to sneak around down here, being a basement with no windows and not the brightest lighting. It also helped that I was in the body of a small boy.

They were on patrol and were doing mundane tasks like checking something on the computer or moving crates, taking things out of them, etc. I waited for them to be alone, and then I snuck up on them, telling Primeape to hit them gently at the back of their heads, knocking them out. I had my Tangela provide the vines to tie them up very tightly, and put tape over their mouths and eyes so they wouldn't be a nuisance.

I did this while checking out all the rooms on B1 floor, occasionally gathering useful Pokemon items. I even found a small safe that I had Charmeleon cut open with his Steel Claw, and discovered wads

of cash.

"Holy money!" I couldn't contain myself. I stuffed all the bills in my knapsack. Not only was this a nice pay day, it was also going to put a dent into Team Rocket's plans.

It's hard to do evil deeds without the funds. Perhaps a few of the newer Rocket members would quit being Rockets if they found out they weren't gonna get their next paycheck.

On three occasions it was impossible for me to avoid battle, due to where and how the Rockets were patrolling. In these cases, it was easy for me to destroy these dudes with my overpowered team.

"How can a kid be so strong…!" One of them said as my Graveler knocked him unconscious.

His Ekans and Machop had been defeated easily by my team.

And then another dude recognized me.

"You! You Jigglypuff mask!" He said, but not long before also being knocked unconscious.

In B2 I found more valuables and a bit more cash. I took out a few more Rockets here and tied them up. I found an elevator but required a special key card to even open the doors, and none of the goons I knocked out so far had them. I had no choice but to take the stairs to B3.

In B3 I found two Rockets standing outside a particular door, standing guard. I was able to eavesdrop without being seen.

"How long are we supposed to guard her anyways? I'm so bored," one said to the other.

"I dunno, man, we just gotta follow instructions."

Hmm… 'Guard her'? Anyone that the Rockets were keeping captive was potentially someone that I should be saving. The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Standing around the corner and out of sight, I took out the two guards by having my Gloom release her Sleep Powder at a slow, controlled rate. I then had Pidgeotto fan her wings gently toward the two guards. By the time they had noticed the purple powders, it was too late.

"I'm …. so… sleepy…" one of them said.

"Wagarbralargaba…." the other replied.

I tied them up and retried a key card from one of them. It opened the door they were guarding.

It was a large room, almost pitch black. It also didn't help that there were stacks of crates impeding the vision all the way to the back. It was the stereotypical evil lair storage room slash hostage room.

"Wha…? Who's there?" I heard a weak voice from the back. A… girl's voice…?

There was a single yellow lightbulb illuminating a person tied to a chair. And the face of the fatigued and disoriented (but thankfully, not physical beaten up) face was… Erina! My friend from Mt. Moon.

"Erina! What are YOU doing here?!" I said, motioning to my Raticate to bite through the ropes. I removed my Jigglypuff mask and splashed some water from a bottle to wake her up from a daze. Most likely intoxication from inhaling gas from a Team Rocket's Koffing.

"It's…you…!" She was weak, but she recognized me and her pupils were coming into focus. It was a good sign.

"Come on, let's get you out of here," I said, helping her up and drew her arms around my shoulder.

"Wait! It's a trap!" She woke up enough to warn me.

From outside the room, I heard the warning screeches from my Zubat, whom I had instructed to use echolocation to detect anyone approaching. And indeed there were.

"Eek! Eek! Eek! Eek! Eek!" Zubat screeched. So at least 5 approaching Rockets, and probably more.

"Hahaha! You feel right into our trap, GREEN!" the one in the middle of the group said. The Rockets had their typical Pokemon out to fight: Ekans, Koffing, Machop, Rattata, etc.

I immediately judged in my head that it wouldn't be a problem for me to muscle my way through these noobs. But I had to do it quickly. There was a difference between sneaking around taking out Rockets in small numbers and being surrounded by all of them all at once. The longer we stayed, the harder it would be for us to make it out unscathed. And the fact that Erina needed to get to a doctor to make sure she wasn't poisoned was more important than anything.

But why did the Rocket think that I'm Green?

As my Pokemon were going berserk over the Rockets, Erina gathered enough strength to speak again.

"Is she here? Did she come with you?!" she asked, urgently.

"Uh, no. I came alone. Who is 'she'? And what are you doing here anyways?"

But before she could say more, I heard more shrieks from Zubat, who flew back to my position. It was bad. It meant that there were more people than he could "eek."

"Well, I guess it's time for some serious ass-kicking," I said, getting ready to unleash more of my Pokemon, but then suddenly the lights went off in the entire floor.

The whole floor turned pitch black for a few seconds because there were no windows, but then the red emergency lights kicked in so we could just barely see.

"He's here!" I heard a Rocket shout from way back in their lines.

"Get him! He's just one guy!"

"Ekans, Koffing, ATTACK!"

But soon these turned into screams of agony and pain, as something started taking them out. The Rockets had originally surrounded me, but now they were the ones that were surrounded, their Pokemon being knocked out by my own, and whatever was behind them.

Eventually, the unconscious bodies of the Rockets and their Pokemon piled up and I could see what was happening on the other side. It was a giant Exeggutor, Victreebel, and Vileplume that were hilariously overpowering the Rocket Pokemon. And while this team was efficiently taking out Rocket Pokemon, there was a person, clad in all black, wearing a motorcycle helmet with dark green tints. It was Green.

Rocket tried to punch and kick and tackle Green, but it was all too easy for Green to take them out in hand-to-hand combat. It was like watching Batman take out goons. Green's speed and accuracy in combat was something to admire. The fact that his face was covered and he didn't say anything as he was doing this made him scarier. I was glad that he was on our side. Kinda slimmer than I thought he would be, though.

It was down to the last guy, and Victreebel was holding him in the air up by his throat using her vines.

"Argh, ekg…" he was struggling to breathe.

"Where's your boss?" Green said, his voice scrambled.

"I'll never tell-" and then Green punched him in the face, knocking him out.

Exeggutor headbutted the security cameras in the hall, and when the coast was clear, Green took off his helmet.

"Sis!" Erina ran up and gave him a hug.

I mean… HER.

Green was none other than the Celadon City Gym Leader, Erika.

Game Corner (Part 2)

A/N: I've changed the ending of this chapter, especially vs. Giovanni.

Game Corner (Part 2)

I mean OF COURSE Erika was Green.

Green was known to operate around Celadon City, whose city gym was GRASS AND PLANT themed, for crying out loud. Green was careful not to be caught on security cams, but what few blurry pictures we DID have always shown a thin, smaller frame of body… because she was a woman.

It seemed so obvious now that Erika (in her tight black suit) was right in front of me. The gentle and seemingly frail demeanor she let off as Erika the Gym Leader was probably a genuine side of her, but it also did serve as a face to hide her incredible mental acuity and physical combat abilities. It was a classic superhero's secret identity, and I was totally digging it.

It was obvious with Erina, my friend from Mt. Moon standing beside her now, that the two of them were sisters. How the heck did I not see it before? The two of them were very obviously sisters with their jet black hair, fair skin, and pretty faces. But I'm telling you that NO ONE, not including me, would've ever imagined in a thousand years that the soft-spoken, delicate Erika in her kimono was the Rocket-ass-kicking vigilante-in-a-motorcycle-helmet agent Green.

"There's time later to talk," I said, putting my Jigglypuff mask on. "Let's get out of here before more of them show up."

"NO!" Erina almost shouted. She reached into a hidden pocket and produced a keycard. "This is the only chance we can get rid of Team Rocket from Celadon."

"This…" Erika took the keycard from her. "This is what I needed to get into the command center. How did you…?"

"Sis… you have to take them out, and get the evidence we need to go to the authorities-" But Erina was in bad shape. A fit of coughing stopped her mid-sentence.

Even though she had regained a small burst of energy upon seeing me and her sister, it was clear that she needed to go get medical help.

"Erika, go," I said, taking the keycard from Erina's hand. "Take Erina to the hospital. I can take it from here."

I felt the internal dilemma in each of the sisters. Erina wanted Erika to help me take out the Rockets. To rid Celadon from the Rockets was, after all, what Erika wanted the most. To leave now might mean that a better chance would never present itself.

Erika knew this too, and I could see it in her eyes. But the hesitation was only there for a fraction of a second. Nothing was more important than her family.

"The lift is that way," Erika said, giving me directions. "I'll be back as soon as I can, after my sister is in a safe place."

The Rocket reinforcements were already swarming.

"Here, put these on," Erika said, giving me a gas mask. As she helped Erina put hers on, Erika's Gloom was letting out a thick clog of purple Poison Powder.

"Argh! It's Poison Powder! Retreat to the staircases and get the ventilation going on at max level!" a Rocket lieutenant shouted.

If it was just Erika and me, we would have no problem fighting through, but with Erina, we needed a safer route out.

"Come this way!" I led them to a wall, an edge of the infrastructure.

Graveler easily ripped open the concrete wall, revealing the dirt. Then, it was all up to my Diglett.

"You know what to do, buddy. Lead them away from the noise and come out somewhere quiet, okay? Then doubleback and cover your

tracks."

Erika looked back and nodded at me in thanks.

With the sisters out of harm's way, it was easy for me to get around the Rockets. The building was still being lit with emergency lights, so going from dark corner to corner, I quickly made my way to the lift. Fortunately, it was still being powered by the emergency generator. I used the key card and it opened without a problem.

I had to use the key card again to be able to press the buttons inside the lift, and I selected B4. There was a secret room there that was only accessible through this elevator.

I expected the door to open to a whole gang of Rockets waiting for me, but it opened to a wall 10 feet in front of me, and was quiet. The whole area was decked out in fancy carpets and wallpapers, and since it was lit by oil-lamps, was better lit than the upper floors. I cautiously walked out and turned to the right, since the left was a dead end. Peeking over the corner, I could see one Rocket guy standing guard, and a part of the large wooden door he was guarding. There was probably another one standing on the other right side of the door.

"Hey! Who are-"

The guy could say no more before my Pikachu electrocuted both guards. I tied them up tightly to take them out of the equation.

The wooden door was the only way forward. And normally I would've been more cautious, but I knew exactly who was behind the door.

The door was unlocked and revealed a very elegant room furnished with the wooden antique furniture of the highest quality. There, sitting behind the giant mahogany desk, was Giovanni.

The room was very dimly lit so at first, I could not see his eyes. It also didn't help that the thick smoke from the cigar in his mouth was also obscuring his face. When the smoke cleared up a bit, I could see him. Giovanni, in the flesh, with his black Rocket blazer and

white turtle-neck.

If he could've seen under my mask, he might've been upset that I was stifling a laugh.

"So who are you supposed to be?" Giovanni said, still sitting in his leather seat. "A Jigglypuff mask. I've gotten reports of your activities since you meddled with our shipments in Vermillion… it's quite surprising to see you'd walk into our business here in Celadon. Should've known you were working with this pesky Green fellow."

I said nothing, but readied myself for battle. He got up from his seat with a Pokeball in his hand.

"I need to make an example out of both of you," he said. "To show the world what happens if you mess with Team Rocket!"

An Onix came out, and thank goodness that this particular room was very spacious and had high ceilings, otherwise we would have all been crushed. I don't think the original Pokemon game designers really thought through some situations deeply, like having water Pokemon "swim" on land, or using Dig, Surf or Fly indoors in tight spaces…

In any case, I judged that it would be best to restrict Onix's movements in this indoor space.

"Onix, use- hey, wha?" Giovanni was surprised to see Ivysaur thrashing Onix around with vines wrapped around him. Compared to Brock's Onix, Giovanni's was pathetic.

Giovanni recalled his Onix and sent out his Rhyhorn.

"Tackle, full speed!" he instructed.

I don't know what he expected, but my Ivysaur was a tanky boy. He wasn't going to do any damage. But the leader of Team Rocket wouldn't be the leader of Team Rocket if he wasn't a cheating douche. As Rhyhorn was charging, I caught Giovanni throwing a second Pokeball somewhere behind me in an underhanded toss. I knew what was up, and released a Pokeball of my own.

Giovanni's Kangaskhan came out of the Pokeball behind me, and seemed to have no reservations as it tried to punch me. If it wasn't for the fact that I expected Giovanni to play dirty, I literally would have died. Luckily, I never underestimate anyone, and that's why Kangaskhan's punch didn't hit me, but rather my boy Snorlax right on his big tummy.

"Goooorrr?!" Snorlax was less than pleased. Of course he was! He came out of his Pokeball expecting a feast in front of him, only to find a punch into his stomach. This is not the snack I wanted, he seemed to scream.

Very few Pokemon can withstand the wrath of a hungry and annoyed Snorlax. Kangaskhan tried to guard against the furries of Snorlax, but ended up eating a dozen chubby fists in the face.

Snorlax then turned to find Ivysaur's vines holding Rhyhorn up in the air, and started charging at him. Ivysaur released Rhyhorn on my command, and Snorlax body-checked him mid air, towards Giovanni. If he didn't jump out of the way at the last second, he would've been crushed by the giant Rhyhorn.

"Hmph, seems like you're more skilled than you look, Green," he said. "I hope you understand, though, that I can't be wasting my time here with an amateur like you. Just because you've defeated some of my weaker Pokemon, don't think that you've bested me for good."

He must've activated a secret switch, because suddenly the secret panels of the walls surrounding me opened up, and no fewer than six Koffings started flooding the room with toxic gas. As the room filled up with the unbreathable gas I saw Giovanni with a gas mask already on, walking out through a secret escape door in the back.

I had thought that it was going too easily. Turns out Giovannie was a sly dude, testing out my skills by using his B team. It gave me some food for thought, and how to plan for my next encounter against him.

I had just enough time to grab an important looking briefcase and escape the Rock lair, disappearing into the night.

A Conversation with Erika

A/N: Would appreciate your support as I continue this journey:

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In the morning I found my way back to Celadon City Gym under the pretense of another flower arrangement class. The receptionist led me to a classroom, one different from last time. In a few minutes, Erika, dressed in her lovely kimono with floral patterns, entered the room. She bowed, closed the doors behind her so that we were alone in the room, then pressed a code in the keypad on the wall.

The doors locked audibly, shutters came down to cover all the windows, and finally an electronic voice declared: "room secured."

"First and foremost, allow me to express my gratitude," Erika said, bowing. "Your help in finding and rescuing my sister was most appreciated."

"No thanks is needed. She is my friend. Is she okay? I didn't call the local hospitals or clinics in case the Rockets were looking for her again," I said.

Erika smiled and pressed a different code into the keypad. A part of the wall unlocked and a secret doorway opened. I followed her and found Erina resting in a patient's bed with medical equipment reading her fortunately stable vitals. She weakly opened eyes, and smiled at the sight of me.

"Our doctor is an old family friend. Erina will be safe here," Erika explained. "She inhaled a bit of Koffing gas and received a few bruises, but fortunately, she's okay." Erika looked at her injured sister with what seemed like a mixture of sadness and anger.

Erina must've picked up a bit of this, because even in her weak state she said, with some confidence: "I told you, I didn't tell them anything, sis. They don't know who Green-"

"That's NOT why I am angry!" Erike raised her voice, surprising both her sister and me. It was the first time I had heard Erika break the equilibrium of her emotions. Who knew that underneath that meek demeanor she puts on in public, was a badass tigress. "You should not have gotten involved."

And just as quickly, her anger was replaced by an expression of fear.

"If- If anything had happened to you… If you had gotten-" Erika paused and took a deep breath. "I would never have been able to forgive myself if you had gotten hurt," she said.

A heavy silence fell upon the room.

Finally Erina started. "I'm sorry." Tears started to flow down Erina's face.

The two sisters hugged one another, both of them crying silently. I quietly left the room and gave them some space.

After a bit of time, Erika came out, as composed and poised as ever.

"She fell asleep," she said, closing the door to Erina's recovery room behind her.

"So," she said, becoming more serious. "It seems like both of us have a sort of secret life, operating behind a mask."

"And a public ruse," I said.

Erika smiled. We stared at each other's eyes for a few moments.

"I'll tell you my secrets if you tell me yours," she said.

For the proceeding two hours, over some tea and biscuits, I told her about Mt. Moon, how Erina and I had met, our unavoidable run-in with Team Rocket, and how Surge was working with them. I told them about how I sabotaged every Rocket operation that I came across. Erika listened in silence, then told me her story. It was far more interesting than mine.

Erika's family came from an old line of nobles that founded the settlement that we now know as Celadon City. Though rich and powerful beyond imagination, her ancestors did not allow greed or hubris to corrupt them. On the contrary, they became true benefactors and protectors of the city and its inhabitants. They invested in helping the poor, the development of commerce and technology, and sustainable energy (there was a reason why the Celadon City Gym was Plant-type).

Generations ago, the head of the family made the decision to stay out of the spotlight of the media and politics, but to serve the people of the city in unseen ways. In the more recent years, when Erika and Erina's parents had passed away from an unfortunate accident.

"My parents sensed Team Rocket trying to expand their influence into Celadon City, and had successfully repelled them. They had heard about Team Rocket activities in different areas of the region and were…" Erika could not finish this sentence. It was clear that although there was no substantial evidence, she thought that Team Rocket was somehow responsible for her parents' demise.

"My grandparents were already elderly, and they completely dropped out of the public sphere to raise me and my sister."

Erika's grandparents had been too old to combat Team Rocket the way her parents could, but they were not helpless. They had been successful in erasing all public records of Erika and Erina's connection to their family, keeping them from being in Team Rocket crosshairs. They had also preserved the family's considerable wealth in various ways. Finally, they had been able to limit, if not completely avert, the vermin's influence to the rat hole from which Erika and I had rescued her sister.

These days, Erika had taken the reins as the acting head of the family, while her grandparents lived quietly, protected from those who might hurt them by anonymity. But things were not all well in Celadon City. There was a limit to what Erika could do, as she had to run the gym during the day, and lived the life of a superhero through the night. After Mt. Moon, Team Rocket had somehow connected Erina to "Green," and well, now we're mostly caught up with the story.

"So now we're here," I said. "Where do we go from here?"

Erika pondered for a bit.

"It's clear we both share a common enemy. And to be truthful, I have been keeping track of your activity since you have met Erina."

"What do you mean? Like you've been spying on me?" I asked. Have I been less than careful somewhere?

"Not YOU exactly," Erika smiled, probably amused by my perplexed expression, which I was not doing a good job of hiding. "I've been keeping tabs on as much Team Rocket activity within the Kanto region as I could, of course. But starting a few weeks ago, a mysterious power had been putting a wrench in their plans. I first picked up the trace at Mt. Moon, of course, hearing from Erina. Then I'd been keeping tabs on the mysterious person's movements through Cerulean, Vermilion, etc. I hadn't been able to identify the person, but I'd been following the patterns. And it turns out… it was you."

I felt a kind of relief. It was alright that Erika had been able to put things together, as long as I knew I hadn't slipped up somewhere to leave traces of my identity. It wasn't just me I had to worry about, of course. There was Bill, Misty, Brock, and other allies working in hiding.

Erika seemed to follow a thought that entered her head, and then broke out in a laugh. My god, she was beautiful when she laughed.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

Erika composed herself and explained.

Apparently, during an annual meeting of the eight gym leaders in the Kanto region, Misty had approached Erika and tried to make small talk. Erika had the facade of an innocent tree-hugger to uphold, so she simply made polite responses without making an effort to start a friendship. After a while, Misty said her goodbyes and walked away. Meanwhile, Erika noticed Brock by himself, leaning against the wall, his arms crossed, scanning the room silently. At the time, she

thought he was staring at the female gym leaders in a creepy way (could be partly true!), but now that she thought about it, she said, it was because…

"Wow!" Erika laughed again. "Misty and Brock, huh?"

She must've sensed my slight panic because she tried to put me at ease.

"Oh, don't worry, you didn't give anything away. It's just… all this time, I thought it was just me… Trying to fight them all by myself, to try to protect my sister, and my home. I could never have been sure the other gym leaders were innocent of Team Rocket influence."

I recalled how Lt. Surge had been working with Team Rocket, even though he wasn't a Rocket himself. It made sense that Erika had to be careful, to be skeptical about other gym leaders.

Erika was lost in her thoughts again, at first she was smiling (probably thinking of Misty and Brock), then her expression turned serious again (probably thinking of how Erina was in danger).

"You think you'd be free to take a phone call tonight?" I interrupted, and she turned towards me with a questioning expression. "I'd like to introduce you to a few friends."

"I-" She hesitated, but only for a fraction of a second. "Yes. I'd like that." And thus the Resistance had expanded.

The call that night, with Misty, Brock, and now Erika, continued into the very early hours of the morning.

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Wrapping Up Things at Celadon City

Would appreciate your support as I continue this journey:

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"What? She OWNS the entire department store? The Celadon Department store?" Bill asked on the phone, incredulous.

I was sitting on my bed, barely awake.

"Yes, Bill, but please, don't shout into the microphone. Going deaf here."

"But, but, how can I NOT get excited? Do you realize how much we've been searching for a way to distribute resources? And, and, information?!"

This was true. While Misty and Brock were able to control things in the Northern areas of Kanto, they were experiencing a blackout in the other areas. They didn't know who to trust, and it proved difficult to recruit new members into the Resistance.

But the newfound alliance was welcome on both sides. Erina was caught by Team Rocket because she was trying to prove herself to her sister. Erina was trying to prove herself to her sister because her sister had no other help. But with new allies, Erika saw that she could keep Erina within reasonable boundaries of safety.

"She is fine physically, just a few cuts and bruises," Erika said, about her sister's injuries. "But she was scared. Fear broke her, and it will take her some time to recover from that. We reached a consensus about how she can help me and Celadon City without putting herself in harm's way."

I was glad to hear that.

"That's where YOU come in, Bill," I said.

I had proposed that Bill take Erina under his wings, teaching her about his Pokemon research and cutting edge technology. Erika liked this idea because it appeased Erina into a support role, while keeping the younger sister out of the line of fire. Erika even agreed to finance some of her considerable wealth towards Bill's research and development.

"Hmm," Bill considered the idea. "Well, I could always use the help, and well… the funds…"

"Uhh.. hello? Bill? You still there?"

Bill sounded lost in his thoughts. It was clear that he was thinking of what he can achieve with the sudden increase in budget.

After that conversation was over, I set out to prepare to depart Celadon City. The Resistance members and I had our meeting yesterday, and it was time that our plans were set to motion, albeit slowly and carefully.

My first stop was near the Game Corner, which was, understandably, closed today. Makes sense, we destroyed half the basement. But the affiliated shop next door was open, and with my Game Coins, I purchased a Dratini, Porygon, Scyther, and Pinsir.

The second stop was at the Celadon Department Store, where the Manager of VIP Customer Service was waiting for me. He welcomed me with the utmost politeness and top notch service, leading me to the VIP lounge that was, wow, let me just tell you, very nice. A staff member brought over some iced tea while the Manager started to explain to me the various services that were available to me.

"This VIP card is for you, compliments of the owner of Celadon Department Store," the Manager said, and by the way he said this I could tell that although he was instructed to say this by one of his bosses, he had no idea who ACTUALLY owned the Celadon Department Store. I doubted that even the Manager's bosses knew themselves either.

"Please present this card to any of our stores or restaurants, and you will be able to use the available funds. Let me just check the

balance on this for you with this machine… Hmm.. that's odd… It says there is no limit on this card… Oh, it must be one of those cards limited by an expiry date. Let me check that for you, young sir. Oh… there's no expiry date on this either… Uhmm… I'll be right back, I just have to make a phone call."

The Manager excused himself, taking the VIP card with him, supposedly making some phone calls to check whether it was really okay to give a young kid the power of god in the Department Store. He came back in a few minutes to present the card to me.

Let me just say, my girl Erika knows how to hook up a friend.

I went on a veritable shopping spree. Got an entire new wardrobe, new camping gear, Pokemon accessories (plenty of Pokeballs), potions, etc. I even went to the supplements store to get not only the best Pokemon food but vitamins and other boosters that would give my Pokemon a physical edge. These were all paid for, of course, using the VIP card.

Then the Manager took me to a different floor, entirely devoted to more expensive luxury items. Most of the stuff were for the small demographic of clientele that might be interested in having indoor furniture for Pokemon (think cat towers except… Pokemon towers), pajamas for Pokemon made of silk, super expensive jewelry with Pokemon-related designs, etc. But the Manager must've read my face because he took me to a section where, my oh my, there were…. STONES. Fire stones, Water stones, Thunder stones, Leaf stones, even a few of the rare Moon Stones.

"I'll take 3 of each," I said, pointing to the elemental ones.

After all the shopping spree, the Manager personally escorted me to a fancy car outside, which took me to one of the best restaurants in the City. It was a Pokemon friendly restaurant, and they gave me a very large room all to myself so that I can dine with my Pokemon as well. The Chef came out and personally thanked me for visiting her restaurant.

"It was requested that I keep the food coming until you and your Pokemon have had your fill," she said. "Oh, don't worry about the

bill. It is already all paid for."

Huh. I thought maybe I should stay in Celadon City for a few days. Maybe a few weeks. I was being pampered by this VIP service.

But I felt I had indulged enough. There was work to be done. This world was not like in the games where you can wake up safely after a defeat and continue from there. If I ever lost a battle with Team Rocket, it could be the end of me. Or even worse, it could be the end of the entire Resistance.

So after my shopping spree and fancy meal, I asked the driver to take me to the address that Erika had shared with me.

"I need a quiet place to train," I had told her. "But not your gym, of course. Team Rocket might be watching, and it would be weird if I were to keep visiting the gym that I'd already earned the badge from."

Erika smiled.

"There are places in the city that are in place for things just like this."

So the driver took me to a small office building with a sign that read "Celadon City Pokemon Foundation." There were posters on the windows that explained opportunities for community service and charitable donations to help Pokemon that were unable to survive in the wild.

I walked into the office and there were two staff members that warmly welcomed me. They must've been expecting me because they immediately led me to a consulting room in the back, even though I hadn't the slightest clue why Erika had sent me to a charity foundation (although it was nice!).

"Please be seated," one of the staff gestured to a single office chair in the middle of a sizable room.

I was a bit puzzled, but I went along. When I took my seat, the staff left the room, closing the door behind them.

A few seconds passed in silence. Then suddenly, I felt a gentle

rumble as I felt the floor beneath me move down. The damn room was an ELEVATOR. And it was taking me down below to… what?

What felt like an entire minute passed by, and the movement stopped. I went and opened the door I walked through, and it was pitch black. The light from within the elevator attempted feebly to illuminate the thick darkness of the unknown space.

I mustered up the courage and walked through, and was wondering if I had to look for a lightswitch when a motion detector must've detected my movements. The lights suddenly came on with a loud click, and it flooded the entire space.

It was just like a Pokemon gym, but without the seating area for spectators. There was a console with a blinking light, and when I turned it on, it gave me options to change the field conditions (rocky, muddy, partial pool, full pool, artificial forest or grass, etc.). It was a training area for Pokemon.

There was also a door close to the elevator that led to something that led to a lengthy hallway with more doors. I opened every single one of them. It was crazy. There was every possible room that I could ask for if I wanted to become a better Pokemon trainer. A room for Pokemon strength training (weights), a room for dexterity and agility (robot combat machines and several reflex test machines), a room for recovery (a machine much alike one you'd find in a Pokemon Center), a room for rest (bed and bath), etc. There was a room with computers for Pokemon analytics, an automated kitchen that was fully stocked, a room with shelves upon shelves of Pokemon medicine, etc… Of course, there was a fully furnished apartment for me as well.

I was just finishing up a tour of the place which left me in awe when I heard the elevator being activated. Something was coming down. I was getting ready to send out my Pokemon just in case it was an unwelcome guest, when the door opened to… no one. There were just some wooden crates in the middle of the elevator, neatly organized.

It was several crates full of Pokeballs, each carrying a Pokemon inside. There was a note on top:

These are being loaned to you to help you train. They're some of our very best. Good luck.

It was written in a dark green ink, so I don't have to explain to you who wrote it.

It was going to be an interesting time training against other well-trained Pokemon.

Would appreciate your support as I continue this journey:

Buymeacoffee mypokemonafterlife